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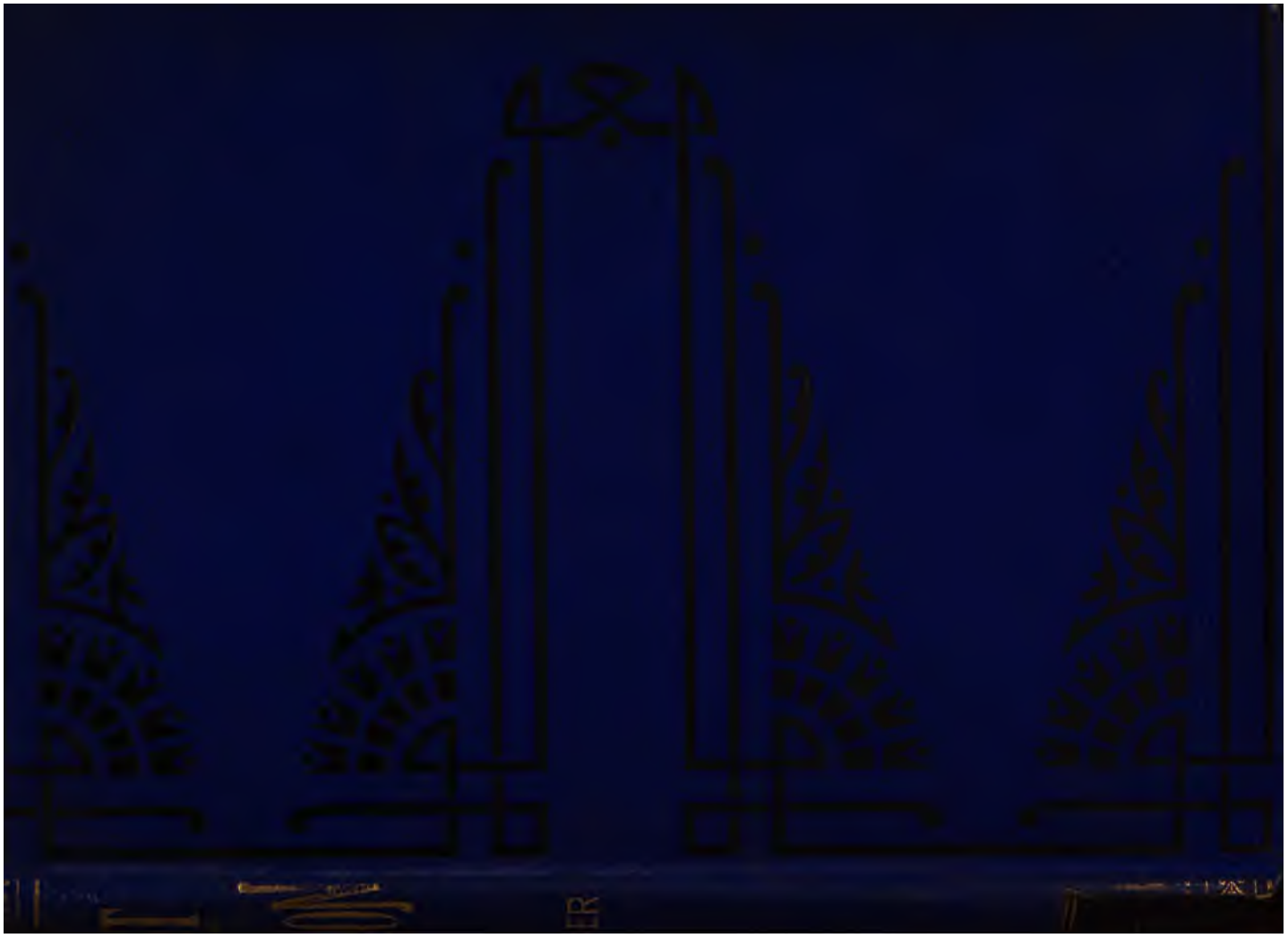

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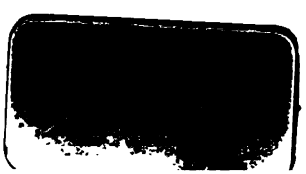

MART AND MANSION.

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MART AND MANSION:

A Tale of Struggle and Rest.

BY

PHILIP MASSINGER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

It sped through the laughing green,
  It hid in the purple heath;
I looked;—it was only the sheen
  That danced on the torrent's wreath.

Yet a moment in wanton play,
  It courted the lusting crowd;
But was gone on the golden ray
  That shot from the evening cloud!

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CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	The Schoolboard	1
II.	Summer Leaves	8
III.	A Young Man	11
IV.	Old and Young	22
V.	Rossleigh Grange	35
VI.	What Next?	44
VII.	Sentiment	54
VIII.	Miss Susan	63
IX.	John at Home	71
X.	Is Learned, but Ends Suddenly	74
XI.	The Moonlit Garden	84
XII.	Ups and Downs	90
XIII.	A Day's Out	98
XIV.	An Encounter	108
XV.	Human Toil	118
XVI.	The Literary and Theoretical Club	126
XVII.	The Coming Contest	142
XVIII.	The Dinner Party	149

CHAP.		PAGE
XIX.	NOT A MURDER?	166
XX.	THE DRAWING ROOM.	176
XXI.	MESSAGE AND MESSENGER	191
XXII.	COMING	200
XXIII.	THE CLOSED OFFICE	204
XXIV.	A VISITOR	212
XXV.	A LUNCHEON	222
XXVI.	GUSTO HALL	234
XXVII.	ADMITTED	239
XXVIII.	SILENT GROWTH	249

MART AND MANSION.

CHAPTER I.

THE SCHOOLBOARD.

The doors were besieged by a mob of shabby fellows (*illotum vulgus*).

Autocrat of the Breakfast Table.

At the period when this narrative opens Newstel was an increasing manufacturing town. It had its long streets and short streets, and streets altogether fine. There were shops with plate-glass fronts, and shops with large square panes. There were columnar chimneys, and vast brick warehouses; buildings of all shapes and sizes, with huge coloured placards stuck about their walls and scaffoldings; wildernesses of

hovels, and crowds of destitute women and children. The poor were very poor; they were separated from the rich by iron palisades, and no end of ceremonies. The poor houses were very poor. You would wonder how any one could live in them at all. Here and there they were lighted up at night by bright flames from the funnel-shaped chimneys. Travellers by the mail train, noticing their lurid appearance, sometimes muttered between their teeth, "All hope abandon ye who enter here."

But that was in reference to the lower end of the town, where the poor were. Harley Street was full of grand shops: it led to the fashionable quarter.

The cabstand there was all alert on the morning when our narrative commences. Not that fares were wanted then; business men were walking to their work, and others were not yet abroad. But the cabmen were on the *qui vive*, at the hour of half-past nine,

about three years ago. They were neither lolling on their boxes, nor reading the *Newstel Chronicle* on the cab-steps. They were congregated in groups here and there, looking through the windows of a smart brick building with three stone pinnacles, a runaway chimney, pointed windows, and a magnificent round entrance filled by two folding-doors, the design of a local artist.

Nobody knew it, but what was going on within at that time was—a squabble.

The Newstel Schoolboard had that morning met for the first time. The majority of the members were, it must be admitted, a trifle inexperienced in the work and requirements of education, some of them having received but little education themselves. But what did that matter? They were only the more eager to show their peculiar fitness for the work assigned them.

While people were craning their necks to see through the windows, the question

before the Board happened to be whether the Chairman—an umbrella manufacturer, elected by seven votes out of twelve—should immediately take the Chair on the simple ground of election, or whether a preliminary was needed, to wit, a speech informing him of his vast responsibilities, and begging his acceptance of the office.

The buzz got louder and louder; even the crowd began to grin as the din reached through the four inches of open window. The poor schoolmasters, waiting below to be inspected, were beginning to think their turns would never come.

At last, Titus Phraser, Esquire, the lawyer, whose early education had *not* been neglected, and whose matured mind had been sharpened by practice of the sharpest kind, settled the dispute by quietly rising, and requesting the gentleman to take the office which had devolved on him, "he could not say by the unanimous (Hear!

Hear!), but by the hearty, concurrence of his colleagues."

The Chairman took his place with applause, and business proceeded, thanks to Mr. Phraser. The latter had shown no genius on this occasion, although he always was showing genius, but he had calmly asserted himself; and the Reverend Mr. Truepeny, the Minister of Bezetha Chapel, was not, as he had expected to be, chosen Vice-Chairman. That coveted dignity was conferred on Mr. Phraser, who accepted it with such smiling readiness, as precluded the necessity of a formal speech.

We must describe Mr. Phraser, as the reader will frequently meet with him.

He was exactly five feet nine in height. His face was smooth and pale, varied with two small tufts of colourless whiskers. His eyes were grey, and his mouth was wide enough to have delighted in the use of table spoons from his youth upwards; while his

head was adorned with a white crown upon a colourless border. In other words, it was bald, its monotony being relieved by a ring of mouse-coloured hair.

Let his portrait be well considered. The remaining eleven men had little claim to distinction. They were plain persons, who had made their way by the factory, the shop, or their respectability. Including the Chairman, four were merchants. Two were shopkeepers, one being in the glass trade and the other in the jewellery business. There were two clergymen, a minister, a Quaker, and a nondescript.

They had all taken their places round the long table, covered with green baize, each having a bottle of ink and quire of foolscap before him.

It was high time to begin. The Chairman had risen to his feet, and uttered a preliminary grunt, and was just about to send for one of the young men waiting below.

But all at once he sat down, and a shudder ran through the members of the Board. They looked at one another in silent astonishment. Whatever was the interruption? A horrid coughing sound seemed to come from the next room, or from the depths of the chimney. Louder and louder the sound rose.

Some of the members became irritated; others got really frightened. At length, the window was thrown up, and a policeman was introduced.

"Hooray!" cried the street urchins. "Bobby 'll be chosen for the Board School!"

But, after a careful examination, nothing was discovered, and the dignitary of the law retired.

It was high time for the Board to set to work. The noise had ceased, but some faces still, it must be owned, showed signs of trepidation. A damp seemed cast over proceedings. It was a bad beginning.

CHAPTER II.

SUMMER LEAVES.

The leafy month of June.
SHELLEY.

SOME eight miles from the red brick building, and about the time of the twelve gentlemen's meeting there, two persons were driving towards their home. That was Rossleigh Grange, up the hill. Across the white road five beech-trees, gay with bright summer foliage, interlocked their branches lovingly with an old elm—fit emblem of the loving union of father and daughter. Leisurely enough was the well-nurtured old mare taking her homeward journey, an occasional application of the whip being only to frighten away a stray fly now and then. There was clearly nothing to hurry about.

The young lady had plenty of time for casting fond glances upon her father's face, or for losing her bright gaze in the clear green covering overhead. The old man listened attentively to all his daughter said. The sound of her voice seemed to charm him more than all the surrounding beauty.

We shall see them again when they have reached Rossleigh. Then we shall form with them a closer acquaintance. They are worth knowing and loving.

But this leafy arch over the road has awakened some past memory in the old man's mind. He presses his hand to his brow, and stops the little phaeton to have a closer look. On the right hand side was a little turnstile. It was formed by three stone steps rudely inserted in the wall, and seemed to lead along the bank of a small rush-covered piece of water, into a plantation of firs. Something about the spot pained the old man acutely.

"It was just here," he said, "about sixteen years ago."

"I know what you mean, father; what a long way they must have wandered!"

"Yes, that was my negligence. But when she was here what could she do? What could she do?" he repeated, sorrowfully.

"A woman of spirit would have let herself be murdered," she replied, with a toss of the head, "before giving up what you had trusted her with. And considering what that was, too!"

"Perhaps so, my dear. But she was surprised. Some ruffian presented himself above the stile there. And he was off with it in an instant. There was no trace of him."

The old man urged his horse to a quicker pace. The spot recalled a painful association. He had soon crossed the river, and mounted the hill to Rossleigh.

There we shall ere long meet the two again.

CHAPTER III.

A YOUNG MAN.

Virtue . . . . . .
Although immortal may be pricked or scratched.
COWPER.

THE first gentleman who met the severe eyes of his critics, we cannot describe; he was by favour taken out of his proper turn, and was probably a good and respectable young man, like thousands of others. The young man who is to come up next is John Bowyer. He is slim and slight, with plenty of black hair and piercing black eyes, and a mouth that seemed to mean what it said. Without being handsome, he has good features, pure and loveable ones, too; but somehow you would not like to provoke him. He looks as if he would carry his purpose against

great odds, and probably that purpose will be a good one. He is no hero. He is only a bit of a schoolmaster. We must apologize for making him prominent, but if his profession is not to the reader's mind, he shall have another in a while.

But he is not a bad fellow. There is a ring of the true metal about him. You could not speak with him for quarter of an hour, and think him a man to be disliked or trifled with. He has a history, which will come out some time. But the anteroom door is opening, and he must pass in to his ordeal.

"A pack of wiseacres!" said the first young man, as he stalked forth with offended dignity.

"Indeed!" said one or two, crowding anxiously round.

"Yes, I couldn't get five minutes' continuous attention from them. As soon as I had shown them a wretched cat squeaking

in the chimney, they went on laughing at their discovery the rest of the time."

The speaker left the building, not knowing the result of the decision. John Bowyer ascended to the awful presence.

He does not look very imposing, but we cannot help feeling a bit of interest in him just now, for his heart is beating high with fear and anxiety, his knees are tottering and his feet are stumbling against every other stair.

See! he has opened the door, and stands confronting the formidable twelve. The room has three long windows, it is "yellow-washed," a large chandelier reaches from the ceiling almost to the green table. The Chairman was facing the centre window, the Vice-Chairman sat opposite, and there were five on either side.

The Clerk had a fresh-cut quill and learned look, at a small desk near the street; he was going to take minutes.

"A little to the right, Mr. Bowyer," said the Chairman, eyeing the name on his paper. "At the corner, please, just so. Between the Vice-Chairman and the next gentleman. Thank you."

"Now, sir, your qualifications," said Mr. Truepeny.

These were already in the hands of the Clerk, and consisted of various excellent testimonials and certificates, speaking of ability and capacity for managing children.

"What experience have you had?" asked one of the merchants.

He had broken in a large London school of 600 pupils in a week's time. His health had suffered, but his lessons of discipline had not been forgotten.

"Thou art not rough with children, friend?" suggested the Quaker, observing his firm brow.

"Not often, sir," was the quiet reply.

"You can write a good hand, a *good*

current hand," said the glass-seller, laying an emphasis on the word good, "cast up accounts, and translate" (knitting his brows over the paper) "Eggzenephon, and—"

A gentleman rose to Order. "Was not this statement of qualifications an acting collusively with the candidate, inconsiderately with themselves, and, ahem—aha—in short, in—un—inbecoming a man? Ought not—"

"Hold still, Mr. Bowyer!" cried Truepeny. "Don't look out of the window."

"Ought not," shouted the jewel dealer, in a perspiration, "ought not the members to ask questions" (a fourth cousin of his would come up soon) "instead of stating claims?"

The Chairman was "unaware of any rule to that effect; but it would 'smooth' matters if members would please to bring questions in quest, instead of winding long-winded 'orns."

The double pun was received with laughter, and the examination proceeded.

"Now, then, Mr. Bowyer, sir," said one of the gentlemen, "yoa luve the good booke?"

This was the signal for another interruption. Some form of that question all (except the Chairman and Phraser) had intended to ask, and thereby to vindicate their superior knowledge and refined feelings. Nor was John surprised to hear a shuffling of feet, and see a concentration of glasses upon himself.

But, unfortunately, at the most important points of our lives, trifling thoughts *will* knock at the door of the mind. Some people burst out laughing when they are in danger. Others brace themselves up to face the dean or the bailiff, and remember only the tuft of grass that blew against their nose yesterday. Perhaps this is the calmness of despair. John was quite unexcited. The

only thing he saw was Mr. Phraser's white waistcoat, which seemed to heave about, expressing (was it contempt, or impatience?) some feeling at variance with the all-absorbing interest of the question, and the apparent look of interest on his own face. Whether education should be secular or religious, had not yet been decided. It was to be discussed to-morrow. The members seemed pretty evenly balanced about it, though some would probably be carried away by any stronger mind which should assert itself.

"Yoa luve the good booke?" asked the gentleman.

Mr. Truepeny could not restrain himself. He was observed to get very red in the face. One of his friends had even patted him on the back, and quietly pointed to a water-bottle. But it was no good. Mr. Truepeny rose, and, swinging his arms akimbo, asked, in a loud voice, "If his ears deceived him?"

"Question!" "Order!" Mr. Phraser's pocket handkerchief seemed to show that he had a cold in his head.

"Am I, or am I not," shouted the reverend gentleman, "master in my own—I mean in the dwelling of the School Board?"

Cries of "No!" "Sit down!" "Go on!"

"That great and good man George—"

Very unluckily, the minister's speech can't be finished, for here the Chairman interfered. The recalcitrant member sat down, but in high dudgeon, and with a sullenness of feature which remained to the close of the meeting.

"The good booke," said the gentleman, sternly looking at Mr. Bowyer as if he were guilty of the confusion.

This was the first opportunity for speaking the latter had had for the last ten minutes, and he determined to make use of it.

"If you mean," said he, "the sacred scriptures, I believe that they require very careful explanation. Explanation may be right or wrong, and I have always tried to teach my scholars the right one."

The two clergymen nodded in assent, and one or two of the merchants seemed to acquiesce.

"But he that runs can understand," said the Quaker. "Thou knowest that, friend?"

"I find it difficult, with all the helps in my range," said the schoolmaster.

"Oh, he's for taking away our plain, homely common sense from us! He'd cast a stigma on our religion, and ruin our children."

"Exactly so," said Mr. Phraser, appropriately rising. "I hope, gentlemen, we shall render dogmatism impossible by our decision to-morrow. Let us have the pure word, and nothing else."

"Of course," chimed in a red-faced mer-

chant. "The existence of an Immaterial Being and the Immortality of the Soul are amply proved in the Epistle to the 'Thessalians' alone."

Phraser drowned the slip by proceeding, in his loudest tones, "Now, young man, your qualifications generally are good" (Hear! Hear!) (No doubt!), "but are you prepared to teach those great truths" (his eye looked dim) "on which we are all agreed? Mark, without note or comment?"

John determined to have one reply more.

"Well, I should say explanation was needed in teaching, perhaps about the Trinity and such matters."

"Then you would actually teach that doctrine in a Board School?" said Phraser.

"Thank you, sir. *Good* morning. I need not say that you will not do for us," said the Chairman.

This decision was indeed disputed by one or two of the more courageous members, but,

on a show of hands, was found to have the approbation of the Board.

So John Bowyer calmly opened the door, and, descending the stairs, called for one of the cabmen, whose curiosity had long ceased. The latter was just finishing a slight but strong morning draught.

CHAPTER IV.

OLD AND YOUNG.

The buoyant child surviving in the man;
Fields, forests, ancient mountains, ocean, sky,
With all their voices—O dare I accuse
My earthly lot as guilty of my spleen?

COLERIDGE.

ROSSLEIGH GRANGE was a beautiful spot. With the outside, and indeed most of the inside, we shall be concerned in a while. At present we will take a peep at the library. This was a large room upstairs, with books all over the four sides, and little ladders here and there. In one or two spaces, or hanging over books, were pictures, such as a Madonna by Murillo, a St. Agnes by Raphael, and a fine dark figure by Teniers. The shelves were filled with all manner of

books, old and new. There were priceless stores of real literary treasures. Froissart and Joinville, in black letter, of course; one of the original editions of Shakespeare; an Aldine Galen, used by Rabelais for his lectures and notes; a manuscript written by Milton's daughters; lots of old poets; reams of forgotten Latin verse literature; shelves of history and fiction. Here were Barrow, and South, and Taylor; there, magazines were bound up, including the latest publications; while the very door-posts were covered with little oil paintings of men one rarely sees now-a-days. Such were Hugh of Lincoln, William of Wickham, Roger Bacon, and an old Duke of Lancaster. Tables were placed about the room, and everything had an air of literary *insouciance*, as if it were well used.

In this room were two persons. They were Edward and Mary Langholme, father and daughter. Edward Langholme was

now an elderly man; his hair was already silvering over; but his figure was still tall and unbending, his step was firm, and he had an ample open brow and finely-shaped features. In his early life he had formed a close friendship with young Walrond, both being long on the foundation of St. Margaret's, Axebridge; a portrait of the latter was hanging over one of the mantelpieces. Of this friendship more will be said directly.

Mary Langholme was just twenty. She was not exactly beautiful, but every line of her face was expressive. She had long flaxen ringlets hanging down a beautifully tapering neck; her light blue eyes seemed almost to speak at times; her lips were always firmly knit together, and her delicate cheeks would often flash up into deep colour, thus giving a vivid hue of depth and intelligence to the whole countenance.

The father and daughter were conversing about some volumes of fiction just received.

The former took up one book after another, laying each down with an air of weariness. At last there was one which seemed to take his fancy. Holding it between his fingers, he said—

"The writer of fiction has, after all, a noble calling, Mary. What he does is useful, and to himself is thoroughly enjoyable."

"I dare say it is so, papa," said the young lady, busy in the first volume of 'The Red Rose.'

"Yes, dear, you will find people rarely employ their lives in that which they really enjoy. Their calling is generally what they like second best, if even that. Each man seems to be one of a crowd running along."

"A crowd, papa?"

"Suppose there were two crowds, one going this way, another that. Having joined one or the other, a man is carried on in spite of himself. If he isn't, he 'll get trodden on or kicked."

"Then it should be easy to be good, sir, if people are forced to it."

"Don't mistake me," said the old man, with energy; "many *are* trodden under foot in the race for goodness, and a few return from the rush to evil."

"But, surely, natural energy counts for something," said the young lady, dropping her book on a valuable copy of 'Ye Shyppe of Fooles.'

"Certainly; some men take to one thing, others to another, and every calling may be ennobled by a lofty purpose."

The girl's eyes flashed in acquiescence.

"All callings are acquired with difficulty, but the exercise of these is painful; and the least failure is regarded as a proof of declining powers."

"But all earnest persons," she said, "must fear failure."

"But the writer of fiction is always practising; and his powers are always ready. If

he fails in one work he can do better in another. And his pleasure is so refined and intense!"

"Indeed, papa?"

"Yes; he resembles the man of strength rejoicing in his powers, or, better still, the boy rushing after school across the village green; most of all, the swift swallow quivering with delight through the yielding air."

"A '*rara avis*' that, surely, sir."

"By a touch of his pen he creates lordly castles; he delineates manners; presents in a new light every-day characters; enters into the depths of the mind; depicts the fairest scenes; places together distant things and persons; and puts before us visions that many a poet has never dreamt of."

"But how few have the gift!" she said.

"There are pretenders everywhere; but 'good things are difficult;' and look at his importance."

"Is that so great, papa?" yawning over a dull scene.

"If the writer feels his mission. What did Scott do for Scotland! What practical reforms have the popular writers of our time achieved! And think how they have taught us to feel interest in the most ordinary things."

"Yes; common life in their hands seems to have the outward beauty of a fine painting."

"The novelist," he said, with fervour, "is satirist and preacher."

"A poor divine sometimes!" she replied, with a meaning look.

"True. Many do injustice to their powers. They adorn vice only, making us like the villain, and despise humdrum virtue. They set up, in fact, a kind of fetish worship, although they boast of extra refinement."

"But books," she returned, "are so dull without variety!"

"Harrowing descriptions certainly lend that," he said; "but for all that, if I were king of letters, I should banish them from my state. The common facts of daily life have a good deal of variety."

"Yes; and we get chained to them and forget their meaning, unless some one interprets them for us."

"You are right," he said; "for historians and essayists are more limited in their range of subjects, or bound by artificial fetters. One of these books" (opening one, somewhat suspiciously), "includes everything in its range, and speaks in the most unpretending style."

"So then," she replied, "the novelist exercises his own powers pleasurably, and teaches us our true selves."

"Exactly, Mary," he said, gravely. "I rejoice that you understand the meaning and intent of a work of fiction."

"Oh, you naughty papa! I will have the

last word. The more murder there is in a book the more I like it."

Edward Langholme sat back in his chair with a sense of weariness. Without the wrinkled brow you could tell that he had known grief. Left an orphan at an early age he had had to depend on his own abilities, and though he had won distinction in his career, he had lacked the sweetest reward of toil, the sympathy of loving friends. That friendship of his with Thomas Walrond had been the greatest and happiest feature in his life. There was hardly a day when he did not gaze on the portrait of his absent friend (now in India), whose influence seemed interwoven with his life. Nearly twenty years ago Langholme's young and beautiful wife had left him to grief; and Walrond had been the one to whom he had looked for consolation.

Thomas Walrond was the owner of Rossleigh Grange. His one fault, the consequence perhaps of fine-strung nerves, was impatience

of rebuke. Being on one occasion irritated by a piece of supposed rudeness, he resolved to leave England altogether. Even then he was wealthy; but in Calcutta he rapidly added to his fortune. Rossleigh he left in charge of Langholme, who was allowed to live there, almost as if it were his own property. With the latter resided his young daughter, and for a time, at least, an infant ward—a boy of a few years—whom Walrond had entrusted to his keeping.

An anxious task Langholme found it to bring up the young girl without a wife's fostering care. He was even now but fifty-eight. But the care of his daughter, together with his own long continued studies, had made him appear much older than he really was, and from the young ward — as our narrative will show — had come a heavy affliction. But in spite of his many troubles Langholme was hale and hearty still, although it was the heartiness of age; for the

vigour of his manhood was spent. His goodly presence, kindly face, and sweet manners made him to be still regarded as the perfect pattern of an English gentleman; he had now lived so long at Rossleigh, that he had come to regard it almost as his own possession.

Of all her father's loving care Mary was, perhaps, thinking at this moment. For she was casting a look of mingled pity and love at the face now bending over the learned book. Her features had all at once become radiant and beautiful. That fitful brilliancy of the eyes and colour showed what an active, excitable mind was at work within. Once fixed on an object of love, Mary was fixed on it for ever. There had been a time, indeed, when her various qualities had seemed as fitful as the colour that went and came upon her smooth cheek; to encourage her efforts into regular habits had been a work of great difficulty to her father. Nothing was more

easily repressed than Mary in her earliest years. But she had been allowed a wise freedom. Watched and protected, indeed, she was, but only as Nature watches over the secluded shrub. And she had grown apace, her good qualities bursting forth gradually into bright perfection. The fostering care bestowed on her met with its reward.

Some found fault with her character and education. These were too full and complete for their taste; the boughs were too many and shapely on the plant that had sprung up under the shade of the parent tree. The strength of will was as strong as ever. The yielding gentleness had never become harsh. The natural generosity had not been turned into meanness. Mary was still what Nature seemed to have intended her to be. She was pure, and free, and lofty, and good. Her education had been unusual, no doubt; and she had her faults, of course. With people's foibles, and with

points of character unintelligible to her, Mary had but little sympathy; and she had caught something of her father's stateliness of manner. But in the love of the neighbouring poor she might have found refuge from censure. The poor called her "Little Aingie." So bright was her look, so soft her step of mercy, they compared her to an angel. Hence her name. And she would glide away as quietly as she had entered their dwellings.

CHAPTER V.

ROSSLEIGH GRANGE.

Mark yon old mansion frowning through the trees.
ROGERS.

ONE of Walrond's ancestors had, in the reign of Edward the Fourth, built Rossleigh Grange. It was a splendid mansion. A tower rose at the western extremity of a long castellated building. Battlements and turrets ran along the central block. From the old grey stone—blackened by time and tempest—peered lancet windows. At the eastern end was a curious old building, now in ruins.

The windows of the upper storey were not all in use. Some had been blocked up at various times; while the modern plate glass of others contrasted strangely with

the surroundings. In the lower storey the builders had consulted light and comfort rather than symmetry of design.

The western tower was surmounted by a smaller one. A spiral staircase led to the base of the second tower. From the summit of the latter was a splendid view of the whole district.

The stern cold outside seemed to threaten a comfortless interior; and in some rooms were strange old tapestry and dark oaken chests that looked gloomy and weirdlike. Grim old warriors pointed their lances here and there. There were flights of stone steps that seemed to lead nowhere; but for all that, many of the rooms were nicely furnished. There were most of the modern appliances for ease and luxury, and the modern comforts did not, on the whole, interfere with the ancient character of the building.

There are still some eight or nine such

old buildings scattered about that part of the country. Some of them have long since fallen into dilapidation; others were purposely injured; while a few are disguised as farm-houses. Rossleigh Grange, owing to its secluded position, had escaped hostile attack, and its owners had always had the means to preserve the fabric in its original condition.

The library was the upstairs room next the tower. It had been formed out of three rooms. The amount of valuable literature was, as has been said, considerable.

Rossleigh had a peculiarity not belonging to the houses scattered about. At its eastern side was an oblong building, somewhat in ruins, with a small tapering spire and four beautiful perpendicular windows. It had been an old chapel. The long beams across the roof, and the pretty windows, together with some oaken fittings, showed its purpose.

On the partition-wall between this building

and the house, about twelve feet from the ground, was a curious hollow in the stone-work. It was said to have led to a secret passage. Langholme had often thought of walling it up. It was rather an eyesore, being filled with loose uncemented bricks. Had he done so, a portion of our narrative would not have been written.

This old chapel had long been disused. For a time it had been devoted in some sense to sacred purposes. Then one or two farming squires had turned it into a granary. But the roof had fallen in, and the corn had been eaten by rats; and from that time the building had been left to the wood-worms and mice. At the present moment the sun was pouring a softened light through the prettily-shaped windows. The latter had long been without glass, but they served to admit the morning ray, and that threw a cheerful aspect over battered wall and column.

Within the main building were rooms and rooms. Many were not used at all. The great central hall, approached by the large front door, was of the height of three ordinary storeys, and of proportionate length and breadth. It was lined with pictures. These were worthy portraits of Walrond's ancestors. In one place was the elegant figure of a courtier, his thin, spare look, coat of lace, and sword of Spanish steel deserving a more honourable mention than any our pages can give. In another place were a boy and girl, dressed as full-grown persons. In this corner were a Minister of State, a general, and naval hero; in that was a fantastic view of a family painted in the garb of deities and nymphs. Fox-hunting squires, with hearty red faces, lined one side; at the top of another was a red-caped cardinal. Here were two of Lawrence's laughing, thin-necked ladies; there was old Sir Anthony Walrond, who

had fought in the Civil Wars. His ample brow and deep black eyes stood out from the canvas full of life. The portrait was by Vandyck.

Rarely are such pictures seen. They were the collected treasures of many generations. Each face looked proud and honest, and thoroughly conscious of its virtues.

The room was steeped in antiquity. It had oaken panels and gloomy recesses, a rusty helmet and spear, and a vast fireplace that would cook fifty modern dinners, and house two or three families of poor curates.

Modern wants had been thoroughly considered. A drawing-room had its pianos and bright sunny pictures. There were nooks and snuggeries and lounging-rooms. One room, partly to tease his interfering friends, Walrond had fitted up as a billiard-room. The board, with its cues and lamps and balls, presented, it must be owned, a somewhat

painful contrast to the old moss-grown outside.

Visitors had never been as comfortable anywhere as at Rossleigh. The bed-rooms were always redolent of rosemary or wild thyme, or something that was sweet and "countryfied," and everything was white and clean.

The household rose early. No one ever lay late at Rossleigh. No one ever had done so since the good days of Edward, except, perhaps, the two unfortunate farmers; and, before breakfast, visitors strolled into the old-fashioned garden. It was shaded with lofty elms, which in summer were festooned with white roses. Here was a weeping willow. There was a broad oak tree, enveloped with thick ivy, almost as old as itself. The flowers grew as they grow only where they are old, and in an old soil. Roses, red and yellow—the Gloire de Dijon amongst them—pansies, carnations, wall-

flowers, geraniums, dahlias, calceolarias, came forth punctually in their seasons. Sometimes all seemed one bright blaze of colour, and in the strangest spots vegetables held the place they had held for centuries; yet everything was so beautifully toned down by age or art, that there was no discrepancy between shrubs, flowers, and trees, which in many places would have matched but ill together.

Dreadful stories were told of Rossleigh, as of many ancient buildings. It was whispered that those underground cellars had been put to horrid uses. In the very centre of the house, just beneath the principal wide stone staircase, had once been dug an old well, sixty feet below the surface. It had been intended for use during siege, and had been connected with the old moat. Either from curiosity, or because of the scarcity of water, this well had been preserved. It was the deepest in that part of the country.

There was a weird sound, if you dropped a pebble into its echoing depths; it struck again and again before the hollow plash at the bottom.

The Grange stood encircled with thick woods of fir. Many of the trees were bent by the easterly winds, which in that district are very severe; but they protected the dwelling. No hostile blast had ever entered Rossleigh.

Half a mile off was the village. It had grown up under the shelter of the Castle. It consisted of one long street, with its two rows of whitewashed cottages. One or two larger houses lay scattered about. Its white speck varied the green hill-side as you looked from Rossleigh towers.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT NEXT?

Consedere duces.
JUV. ETC.

THAT morning draught did it. There was no doubt about it. Cabman, Number—but he hadn't a number. He had left his ticket at home this morning, and not washed the mud off the part where the number was written, lest anything *should* happen on this particular day. That morning draught was better than usual; in fact, it was just one drop more than was customary for our cabman. Right merrily did he drive his charge, John Bowyer. Indeed, the vehicle seemed to be self-moving; the old hack had become a steam dragon, foaming and fretting; ordinary conveyances were winged monsters;

poor people, nearly run over, were genial spirits, overflowing with good-humoured fun and fancy.

Cruikshank's big picture at South Kensington, if you remember it, will explain it all.

It was so very pleasant to have forgotten the driving rain, the summons for the watch-rate, the wife and eight children at home, and on his moving throne to be "o'er a' the ills o' life victorious." It was pleasant, but, alas! pleasure is short-lived.

Now, had John considered the pace at which he was going, a cruel catastrophe would have been avoided. But John was occupied with the thought of his recent adventures, and at this moment was so full of himself, that he never noticed the accelerated progress.

But the gods envy unhallowed prosperity. Our cabman's overweening joy was akin to the mountain tops which provoke Jove's ire.

They were driving to Popper's Row, a shabby-genteel neighbourhood, abounding with houses that had known better days and faded spinsters who let lodgings cheap. The latter were well enough—one or two had "something" in the Bank—but the nearest way of approaching them was through a narrow cross-lane. This was a sort of provincial Seven Dials, and was rarely passed, except in haste or braggadocio. The lane was thickly strewn with children and houses, and required needle-threading-eyed Jehus. Our Jehu did not see very clearly.

Half-way down this aristocratic quarter, lived a gentleman who rejoiced in the curious name of "Claret-box." Not because of the wine of that name. The "Three Fiddles," of which he was landlord, unfortunately boasted of nothing as good. But the name had been applied as a title of honour, from his unrivalled skill in "tapping," as it was called, the most prominent member of

the human face. His real name, as the reader will discover under more painful circumstances, was Withers.

But old, or "owd" Claret-box's reputation was by no means confined to boxing. He was also a poultry-rearer, and many of his fowls' productions, both pickled and fresh, had, when other supply failed, found their way to the neighbouring market.

The "owd" man had seen his best days. But he had still a manly voice. He could sing, he used to say, before tunes came into fashion. On this occasion he sang well.

When Cabby reached Mr. Claret-box's abode, a small chicken was rejoicing in a mud-bath, exactly in the middle of the road. No sooner did the little pet see the coming danger, than it rushed from the horse's feet, only to become entangled in the wheel. It was flattened like a pancake.

It so chanced that Claret-box, Esq., was at that moment enjoying the scenery of the

lane, holding in his lips a choice instrument carved by his own teeth. In a second he had perceived the full weight of the appalling disaster. Being unable to render more effectual assistance, or deliver himself in more appropriate terms, he set up the expressive cry of—"Hoicks!"

The cry extended, say, for a quarter of a mile. As it was well-known in the neighbourhood, and accompanied by a torrent of threats, a crowd was on the spot when the enraged gentleman reached his door-step.

The issue of things was awful. The gentleman's vocabulary was choice. Some of his words, albeit expressive, are omitted even by Johnson. The cabman sobered down a little under the abuse. He directed his horse first into a butcher's shop, and then into a rag-merchant's.

The horse charged neither foe. But it tried to turn the corner of a street hard by; and, carrying the wheels across the curb-

stone, overturned Cabman's eccentric balance. His body was thrown clean into the hands of a dog-meat man.

John was out in a second. No sooner had he touched *terra firma*, than he found himself relieved of watch and purse, the two comprising most of his earthly goods. The boy who had done the deed was turning down an alley thirty yards off, by the time that he had called—"Stop thief!" John repented uttering the words at all, for he immediately became the centre of the jeers and attentions of the crowd.

Strange to say, everybody was accusing *him* of being the cause of the mishap. A wink and nod had passed between Cabby and Claret-box. The one was loudly clamouring for his fare at once, the other for the price of his chicken. John had no money left, even at his lodgings.

Amid the insults of the crowd he began to lose his temper. When lo! just as he

was not wanted, a policeman came in sight. Had X 41 left the beer-shop a moment earlier, he would have prevented the break-down. That honour history cheerfully accords. As it was, he only heard the crowd, headed by his old friend Claret-box, accuse a stranger of having overturned a chaise, by being drunk and disorderly, and shouting—"Hoicks!"

It was vain to deny it. What were protestations of innocence when the whole neighbourhood had heard the shout, and the dog-meat man could swear to the fact that the cabman had been thrown out? No, it wouldn't do. The more he denied it, the plainer it became to X 41 that John was even then drunk and disorderly, and absolutely ignorant of what was taking place.

"Will you take my card?" John asked as a last resource.

The man looked dubious, as if this were

a clever attempt to impose. Cabby and Claret-box gave a knowing wink at one another. However, John felt in his pocket, but even the card-case, which resembled a purse, was gone.

This was the convincing proof of his guilt. He had never had a card in his life, not he. Even people who had no hope of spoil no longer entertained any doubt of his guilt.

So, when Policeman X 41 took him in charge, with a preliminary kick, there was no dissentient voice from the lovers of justice and horseplay.

Perhaps at the bottom there was even a feeling of gratitude that the minister of the law had so easily been got rid of. Perhaps there was. At any rate, the "Three Fiddles" saw a blithe company in the evening, and none were blither than Policeman X 41 (in plain clothes), "owd Claret-box," and Cabby.

As for poor John, he was taken to the town-hall, and safely lodged. The magistrates had already held their sitting, and there was nothing for it but to sleep in the prison. And a very uncomfortable sleep it was. What with the disgrace of the affair, bitter thoughts, and unpleasant companions, John was glad when the night was over. At eleven the next morning he found himself face to face with three plump magistrates, and a wiry clerk, who knew the law for them.

The former were disposed to administer a severe rebuke to John for his intemperate habits, especially as one of them (whispering) thought he had seen his face before.

Policeman X's story, however, did not seem to make a deep impression on the clerk, who, after conferring apart with the magistrates, procured for the prisoner a polite apology and dismissal. John might have

established his innocence by appealing to any member of the Schoolboard, but he felt that he had been insulted by that body. He had no desire for *them* to hear of his misfortune. So, like thousands of others, he suffered patiently.

CHAPTER VII.

SENTIMENT.

There is that within
Makes all external scene, whate'er it be,
Mere dream and phantom.
SMITH'S *Athelwold.*

STRANGE creatures are men, especially men who are fond of Nature's scenes. Some people will traverse half the globe, not to speak of their own land, to get a fine view, and when they reach the longed-for scene, behold! there is some thought or fancy which deforms everything! Sometimes the thoughts they had on the first occasion of visiting the scenes, if they had been there before, recur, and past memories are very often painful. Sometimes there is physical pain, sometimes fear of the future, probably quite groundless, to prevent a man's enjoy-

ing the entirety of the beautiful scene which he has journeyed far to behold. There is a sort of worm gnawing the core, often enough when people make the loudest talk of the beauties they are enjoying.

Ay! and so it has been ever since people began to love solitude, and retired to mountain wilds for abstruse contemplation. The love of Nature's beauty is a slow development of time, and has itself a history; and signs of morbidness have often been found mixed up with its passion. An intense lover of Nature is not always free from something of undue sensibility.

Not that this love should be undervalued. There are few who will not indignantly repeat, "Ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves, Forbode not any severing of our loves!" and whole poems to the same purpose, at the bare mention of such a thing. But for all that the love of Nature is sometimes only a covering for refined cynicism.

And in itself it is a thankless passion. If you have to look at Nature entirely through your own moods, it is likely enough to be a sad look. In order to see its true beauty, you must take a *sympathetic* glance at it. It must be informed by some other mind besides yours. It must be viewed as through a telescope, to which one glass is insufficient. Otherwise it will not repay you for that long journey. The view from the mountain height will be disappointing. And sometimes Nature will be entirely *perverse.* It will elude you and run away. When you are merry, it will be gloomy with pine-trees and falling waters; when you are sad, its face will be gay with the gorgeous tints of dawn; you may be annoyed or indifferent in the forest or on the ocean. You cannot see Nature aright unless you love somebody. Here again Austin was right. "Love, and you may do all."

Some such thoughts as these must have

been passing through the mind of Mary, who was standing in solitary state at the very top of the western tower. Her dress was floating on the breeze, and a pretty fragile creature she looked between earth and sky. Hers was just then a solitude which needed another mind for the interpretation of the beautiful scene outstretched beneath her eyes. But look at her there! What a strange contrast her white robes present with the grey old battlements! And listen! She is saying something. On applying our ears to the wind-current, it sounds like "Pent up." Won't she be "pent up" in her father's castle; but must she, like knight of old, sally forth in search of adventure?

Or were we mistaken? May we venture on an emendation of a doubtful passage? Was the right reading or right hearing, "Sent up?" Is she telling us that she has just "sent up" a gentle sigh to that

monster of a black cloud that is grinning at her girlish folly? Or were we wrong again?

Perhaps she is only telling us about that gaily-painted coach, with its red-coated guard and cheery trumpet, that just now "went up" the distant winding road which leads through the glorious valley? This seems the "harder reading," and therefore, according to the correct rule, should be taken as the right one.

She has perhaps seen from her lofty watch-tower that the coach has set down visitors two miles off—the nearest point to the Grange. The arrival of visitors, if this be so, is a noteworthy event in the country.

But she may well linger over that inspiring view. If she be not in the right mood to appreciate its inner and real meaning, it is sure to be speaking to her in some kind of beautiful language, which

perhaps, after all, is as good as the true sense.

In the midst of a clump of hardy firs, that have braved many a tempest with their gracefully bending boughs, and sweetly-scented leaves and bristling cones, stands the Grange. It lies half-way up the sloping hill, just where the green is becoming purpled with heather, and varied with fragments of deep blue rock. Between the old building and the far off coach-way stands a picturesque village of white cottages, surmounted by a church-tower, embosomed in trees, and ivy-covered.

Then there is a mile's green slope, with a thin strip of yellow walk, and a bubbling stream through the grass. And below that the old turnpike winds up and down, and finally dips to its lowest level just opposite the house. For some way the pretty limestone road winds alongside a crystal trout-stream, which sends a smile

through the sombre tints of the landscape.

How sweetly the water glances in the sunbeam at the foot of the hill! You may see its white sparkle coming from that dark oak copse to the left, where people go picnics for ten miles round, then winding about in playful curves till it reaches the bridge near the road. That old-fashioned bridge has three arches, said to be the Devil's handiwork.

And the hill opposite is the grandest sight of all on a morning like this, when cloud and sunshine rapidly succeed one another. It slopes abruptly; the transient shadows seem to add to its general wildness; rocks are there piled on rocks in the direst confusion; they are of strangest forms; there is heather and turf and bog-land; there is green of every shade. Here and there torrents are tumbling down the steeps, and there are wastes where the foot of man does not

tread. It is a scene of solitude. Far away to the extreme left might be discerned the remains of an old farm-house, used as a shooting-box, blackened by the weather, and hardly distinguishable from the wild rocks around. Straight in front, the hill seemed to culminate in a sort of point, where grew an old blasted yew-tree. This was called, from an old legend current in the neighbourhood, the "Tryst Tree." It could hardly be distinguished but by the practised eye, to which it was one of the landmarks in the valley beyond.

Far away to the right the old road wound along the banks of the river, from which at length diverging, it passed cross-wise up the hill, mounting slopes, lost for awhile, and finally disappearing through a cleft in the hills. That was called Thirlow Pass. There were precipitous rocks on either side. On the other side of the valley, you might look through woods and purple heather and fields

of all colours, till there shone, at the farthest point of sight, a bright ray, like a waterfall. That was a large conservatory near Newstel.

Just beneath Mary's eyes was the bright patch of garden. The bees were humming under the elms, and the flowers were doing their best to vary the green and grey. It was a little paradise in the midst of the wilds.

But whom had the coach set down?

Three gentlemen, who were mounting the hill between the village and the mansion. Mary could almost distinguish their forms as they came up in close conversation, evidently on their way to the Grange.

Mary saw them from her watch-tower, and wondered what they were coming about. Her contemplation of the view ceased, for she felt more interest in them than the scene. And she was right, for men are greater than Nature.

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS SUSAN.

The warmest welcome at an Inn.
SHENSTONE.

YES! But not always at apartments for single gentlemen. Read the following [intercepted and opened] letters.

No. 1 [crumpled].

"14, Darkboys Place,
"13*th August.*

Blot.

Blot.

Blot.

"Mrs. Pritchers,

"MARM, — Ive had the headache bad lately doctor Swipeham says as how you oughtent to have made me tak that two gallons of gin the shavins as been paneted black as you told me for tea-leaves and they

say as old Slofits as got a fortin of many an hundred pound and the burnt suggar as been mixed with the one barrel and the salt with the other oh i forgot to say ive pawned the tin fawkes and spoones but missus the gum arrebic wont mak into iceinglass but ive sent a pound and a harf of putty instead for the rats hole oh deary me i dident tell you that my missus barked her shin Vilently larst evenin agenst the Kitchen fender as she was a-mixin the glew for the pump Handel shes swore at me ever since. Hang her. the catchups come,

"Yours to order,

"SAML. WITHERS."

No. 2 [office blue envelope and paper].

"*Aug.* 13*th.*

"DEAR MR. JAMES,—I hope you can copy the g and w correctly. You have plenty of handwriting by you. No more to day.

"T. P."

No. 3 [the wrong side of a printed bill.]

No date.

"SUSAN,—Consider the engagement Broken Off. You treated me so shamefully about that Fiver that you lent me, you mean Jade, that I have determined to abandon the milk trade and take to the green grocery line. I shall be forced to leave here.

"Yours no longer,

"JONATHAN GRIGTHORPE."

These were all the letters which Mrs. Pritchers' maid ventured to open; a fourth directed to Mr. John Bowyer was so tightly sealed, as to defy stealthy attempts.

Poor Susan must not be judged too harshly. She must not be thought an underhand naughty girl. She was fond of seeing what took place behind people's backs—but so are many. She had her good points. She had tolerably strong affections, and having once got to like a person she would

do a great deal to please him. But once let her regard be met with slight, and she could be exceedingly resentful. With her mistress she was in a chronic state of quarrel,—the aim of the former being to conduct her household at small cost, that of the latter to cause as much trouble as possible by undiscoverable means.

She was fond of a smart ribbon; she spoke very quickly when excited, and had caught of her mistress the trick of using strong expressions. She had often looked into letters before, when she knew Pritchers was out for the day, but seldom had contents pleased her less than these. Her countenance got blacker with each letter. At last she spoke, rather too loudly:

"Pepper and salt, the vixen! if she mixes her stuff with my beer, *I'll* do for her. But old Withers says he got it nicely with his wife's tongue. That's one comfort. The good-for-nothing fellow!"

The second letter, it might be supposed, would have little interest for an illiterate girl. But she had long had an ill-will towards the first-floor lodger. In the first place, he was ugly. Secondly, he never tipped her. Third charge, on one occasion when he had company (ten scarecrows that puffed like tea-kettles!) one of his friends tied a rotten apple to her new ribbon. Fourthly, he sat up late (a-writing, and a-forging, and a-robbing), and annoyed the house with creaking boots.

Some of these charges against Mr. James Hockster were, unfortunately, well-founded. He had ways of his own, and was an unpopular lodger. He was mean. He appeared to be a foreigner: but even that was uncertain, for he spoke English like other people. And he had a great amount of law business, apparently copying-out (*She* had her suspicions, that she had; though she hadn't seen over his shoulder yet), sometimes varied

by tying and untying large piles of newspapers. But to all intents and purposes he was only an ordinary clerk in Mr. Phraser's office. Lawyers' clerks often are very hardly worked. But the last letter was suspicious.

Very neatly did Miss Susan fasten up these letters. The third one for herself she had purposely kept to the last.

As she read the well-known handwriting her features assumed an expression, first of pain, then of disgust and finally of, we confess, we don't know what. For she sat down on the coal-scuttle (it was waiting for the lodger on the second floor), and began to rotate her arms, as if practising dumb-bells, or as if it were a frosty morning, instead of a day in August.—"But see," she exclaimed, "if I'm not Susan Grigthorpe yet!" So enthusiastic was her gesture, that she overturned the scuttle, and scattered the coals all over the tidy, clean floor.

"Lack-a-day! Lack-a-day! Is it so I'm

to be treated, you ungrateful slut, you! Didn't I take you out of the gutter?"

These words, uttered in a very shrill voice, betokened the arrival of the mistress. She had had her suspicions—that she had, about her maid's fidelity. So she had determined this morning to find out whether there was anything between her and the postman; but had arrived too late.

Had an electric bolt fallen straight on the kitchen-floor, poor Susan could not have been more alarmed. She was dumfounded. She had not a word to utter in defence. Luckily, the letters were fastened up, and did not betray her. But when the stirring treble of the mistress again rang through the kitchen, she was only too glad to cover her confusion by an obedient retreat.

"Up with you, madam, and gather those coals. Never presume to have another love-letter in my house. Trot, or MY word, I'll sharpen you."

Susan did trot. Never before had she borne such a meek look on entering Bowyer's room. As gently as a lamb she laid down his coals and letter. More correctly speaking, she was going to lay down the letter, when John anticipated her good intentions. The fact was, that she had put the coal-scuttle on his book-piled table, and was throwing the letter into the fire, when John managed to rescue his imperilled epistle.

Bidding her good-bye for the present, we will take her place in examining another person's letter. This was a brief invitation to John from a well-known person to occupy himself in literary work. It was a great relief to him, though the actual remuneration might not be large; it came to him when he was almost penniless. "And a friend in need is a friend indeed;" he said.

So what did he do?

CHAPTER IX.

JOHN AT HOME.

Pants to be told of battles won or lost.
COWPER.

WHAT did Bowyer do? He sat down with an air of relief in his tiny room that served for bedroom and study. That suspicious looking easy-chair — it looked as if it was something else besides a chair—was loaded with books; books covered the floor, and the presiding genius sat at his books, with an expression as mild as St. Jerome's in the National Gallery.

Oh! but those were often burning thoughts that rushed through his mind in the long, silent hours of the night, when the world was asleep! So desperately had he tried—and hitherto failed—to gain man's respect

by imparting to them knowledge of subjects which they valued. Though he had so far failed, he yet felt within himself capabilities for good or evil, an obligation to exert himself, and a hatred of all convention, which latter he fancied to be genius, although it was but a sign of immaturity. But, on the whole, he was right. There was a voice within him urging him to do or die. There was within him an internal resolution which all the opposition of the world—whether the world of the Schoolboard, or of the magistrates' bench, or of sundry other things, which we shall encounter in our narrative—could not quench. He was one who would be heard of hereafter. He would, though a garret at present bounded him; a few books, as he thought, represented his mind—as if books could represent any one's mind, much less his—and men brushed rudely against him as he passed them by. But we must not predict, lest we prove false prophets.

And, perhaps, he may gain his end with less of turmoil and bustle than he expects.

Meanwhile the doings of another lodger in the same house are perhaps worth notice. It is now ten o'clock, A.M., and Mr. Charles Hockster, clerk of T. Phraser, Esq., is just finishing his second cigar, and with an expression of *ennui* and disgust is preparing to sit down to his "copying." Before long the two young men would know one another better; whether advantageously to one of them, will be seen.

CHAPTER X.

IS LEARNED, BUT ENDS SUDDENLY.

Noctes cœnæque deum.
HOR.

THE three gentlemen alighted and soon reached Rossleigh Grange, one we have already seen—our old friend Mr. Phraser. He was clothed in his white waistcoat and benevolent look; he was walking with his holiday jaunt, and, as usual, made himself an agreeable companion. He had always a fund of pleasant conversation.

The centre of the three was a man, tall and broad-set; he had dark features and a deep voice which always sounded in a cheery way; his light eye ill-matched his dark complexion, and had a merry laughing look; and about his mouth was a constant but not

inane smile as if he could laugh away the wrinkles of his forehead. Altogether Mr. Hardman was a man whom you would like to crack a joke with. His very walk was cheerful, and seemed to conceal a hidden laughter. And yet with a good deal of humour he was often shy and silent for a long time. Then, when he opened his mouth, it was with some droll expression which would set the company in a roar.

Stockbridge, the third gentleman, though not quite as tall as his companion, was better proportioned, and his features were more regular. He had a profusion of light whiskers and beard, and a hard wide brow which seemed able to endure a great deal of work. His face was deeply browned with foreign travel. He had been to the East, and nearly lost his life in rescuing a drowning man in the Mediterranean. He had always plenty to talk about, and was quite a favourite with the ladies, and an ornament in the drawing-

room; and he was a man whom men respected. Few persons made abler speeches than the member for Tindwich.

The three gentlemen were in close conversation all their way up the hill. There was evidently some subject which interested them all. They noticed neither the pretty village nor the tints of the landscape, far less the fragile young lady who had been gesticulating to the winds.

They had reached the gate of the Grange. Mr. Hardman's light hat and suit, and the gentlemanly dress of his two companions, formed a not unpleasing picture under the boughs of the lofty elms. Flowers and trees are not enough to set off a garden to advantage.

Mr. Langholme stood with head uncovered at his house-door, and received his visitors with old-fashioned hospitality. Perhaps he gave the heartiest shake of the hand to Mr. Phraser; but then he was the family lawyer,

and his was a confidential friendship, and he had rarely time for a country visit.

The Grange had many rooms downstairs, used at convenience for meals or conversation. Mr. Langholme generally sat in his library. The gentlemen took luncheon in one of the numerous rooms below, and a pleasant chatty meal they had. Then they wandered about the delightful old grounds till dinner-time. "It was so refreshing," Mr. Phraser said, "to see a dear old house like that, after the smoky town."

At length, with country appetite, they returned to a country dinner, prettily adorned with flowers, and some old plate of the time of Charles II. Though the host had of late been more retiring than usual, a few close friends still drew out his kindly disposition, and under such stimulus he became a most enjoyable companion. Mary was at one end of the table.

"How happy you are here!" said Stock-

bridge, "far away from the tumults of cities and the distractions of politics. A country life is thoroughly to my taste."

"Why, to some extent," Langholme said, "a country gentleman has a pleasant life, but he is apt to find his time hang heavily now and then."

"Still, he has this great satisfaction," rejoined Phraser, "which we professional men know not, that he possesses an assured and stable prosperity, of which he will be robbed by no fluctuations of commerce. The number of men now-a-days reduced to beggary, is heartrending, positively heart-rending! It is, indeed!"

"Well, none need ever fear that," said Langholme, "I'm sure, who are fortunate enough to have as able an administrator of their affairs as you. But that is not what I fear most about your large communities."

"What is it, then?" said Stockbridge.

"I am an old fogey, I know. But what

I fear most is the increase of democratical sentiment."

"A mere appearance, sir," said Phraser; "our large towns have no real fondness for the democratical form of government."

"On the contrary," Stockbridge broke in; "from my experience in the House, I fancy that an increased fondness for democracy is growing up. Some things certainly favour your view, Phraser."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, the name of Republican is not very popular. We have not many Republican clubs, like those on the Continent. Working men at present vote for the questions of the hour, or for what concerns their own physical enjoyment, rather than for the aggrandizement of their class. Many of them prefer cheaper provisions to larger liberties; and many, again, are content to vote in the wake of the class just above them."

"You mean the middle class?"

"Yes; but this is only for a time. Let our friends once come to feel that they have interests of their own, and they will be more determined about them."

"Oh, nonsense!" Phraser said; "the more educated they become, the less will they feel any partial interests."

"Educated! we must wait awhile before we talk of that! At present they have suspended their judgment even about Christianity, and neither believe it nor disbelieve it. But they will not always be in this half-and-half state. So in regard to politics. See if the working class don't soon develop a scheme of their own, and act on it."

"What makes you think that likely?" asked Miss Langholme.

At this point of the conversation Phraser gave a sudden start in his chair, as if something sharp had pained him. Mr. Langholme looked rather alarmed, but made

no remark. Stockbridge did not appear to notice it, but continued:

"Look at that pointed window, Miss Langholme. It is barred and protected, like the whole Grange. This and a thousand such buildings are exhibitions of the power of the rich. When they were built, the poor were dependents."

"Admitted," she replied, gaily.

"But now power and strength are more on the side of the working classes. Physical science and mechanical inventions tend to equalize human abilities. Before the steam-engine and the telegraph, noble and labourer are in one sense equal."

"And again," Langholme said, "labourer and capitalist treat with one another as correlative. There are unions of workmen, lecturers disseminating popular opinions, and governments fearing to legislate where any decisive resistance will be encountered. I cannot help thinking—old-fashioned Tory

though I am—that the ultimate form of government in a powerful and energetic nation, may become popular in name as well as in fact."

"Pardon me if I think you wrong," said Phraser. "I believe the English are proud of their Constitution, and will never part with it."

"I dare say I am wrong," the politician said, in a tone of misgiving. "It is simply my idea about the signs of the times. I seem to notice a growing independence of the Proletariat, and to see its reason. I may be quite wrong, as you say."

"Why!" Phraser exclaimed, "I am perfectly surprised at your erroneous idea, considering your opportunities of observation."

"Well, all I can say is that we have not yet seen a strong-willed opposition to a popular desire for any length of time. Quiet agitation does a great deal at present.

But let Europe once be involved in a serious disturbance. Such a thing might arise at any time. Quiet agitation would, I fear, under the serious suffering, change its character."

During the last remark, Mr. Langholme had been looking grave. The discussion was evidently distasteful to him; and he feared that he had encouraged it by admitting too much. So he abruptly said—

"I don't think any such circumstances will ever occur. You are misled by your opinions and fears, Stockbridge."

"I hope so, indeed," the latter replied.

"Oh! depend upon it," Phraser said, "people are too fond of keeping what they have got, to wish for changes."

This was said in a quiet, confidential tone, which precluded further remark.

Mary was retiring, but in rising she chanced to turn her eye towards the wall. She could not help raising her hands and exclaiming—

"Just look there!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE MOONLIT GARDEN.

What a flood of happiness poured into my heart!
THACKERAY.

SHE might well say, Look there. The view out of the window was more than striking. It was as if a person should peer down into one of the sea-caves with its thousand crystals hanging from an arching roof, and with its sides painted by creamy spray of wondrous patterns, and a beautiful green floor were ready for the feet of the mermaids! At least, this was the idea that presented itself to Stockbridge, who, the reader may suppose, was not too poetical. Politicians have rarely that fault.

The moon, not far from the full, was

shining from a cloudless sky, piercing through the leafy network of elms, dancing on the ground as the wind played in the foliage, casting witching shapes upon the latticed windows, and throwing over walk and flower and arbour that soft, silvery light, which was absolutely perfect. It was delightful.

Mary could not help clapping her hands as the party felt their feet touch the green sward. They had exchanged a lamplit room and a lamplit argument for the most supreme loveliness of Nature.

Mr. Phraser was always very polite. He used often to say that politeness was the salt of life. He had just now held open the garden-door for Miss Mary. His attentions to her were always fatherly, but so gentle and good, that you would have said, "What a kind, good-natured man he is."

But this time Mr. Stockbridge did not allow him much time for the good-natured

display. He came up at the very moment when the door was being held open with prolonged civility. His loud voice and frank manner cut short further parley.

"I say, Phraser, though, what a jolly scene! We might fancy ourselves in a vast Eastern desert, never before trodden by man. Here is a princess, now, in white, with red sash and beautiful face, strictly guarded, ha! ha! by jealous relatives—"

"I'll leave the East to you, who've been there."

"And you there—"

"Well!"

"Bless us, man, don't take me up so sharply. I'll not commit myself by any word that will be actionable. Now" (coaxingly), "don't run away."

"Why, I believe, Miss Langholme," he continued, "we have driven our polite friend off, for he has gone to join your father on that long walk there. I don't understand

him, though I've known him for six years."

"But your political life," the lady returned, "must have given you great experience of character."

"Yes; I can generally understand people. The worst of it is, I sometimes harbour suspicions which are quite unfounded."

"Your politics must be a delightful science?"

"Very delightful. Other sciences have charms. But this includes their delights, and much more. Education itself comes under its sway, for it legislates about that, and sometimes declares what studies are to be pursued as being useful to the State's welfare; and it deals with men in the aggregate; and it employs every faculty of the mind. Just fancy what a State is, with its complexity of parts and multiplicity of agencies! And how delightful it is to some of us to disentangle intricate cases."

"When, alas! we, the poor many, are ignorant that such cases arise," Mary said.

"And it is grand, indeed, to find or search for laws underlying social phenomena. For all these appear reducible to a narrower compass, which is the key as well as the origin of them all."

"And where may these be found, pray?"

"Not in any one book or mind. Here and there a little is discovered; but it will take long to find out all, and long again to bring it into a graduated scale. The facts are not given, but are progressive with human intelligence. So that in their entirety the laws may almost be called undiscoverable."

"It is rather hopeless work, then?"

"Nay," laughing; "there is always a process going on both of discovery and coordination under law, although both parts of the science still need great elaboration. Still there is a discernible process towards the

vanishing point of perfection. In time, we hope, patchwork and bungling will—"

But here a deep groan burst through the moonlit night.

It approached to a shriek. It sounded fearful in the silence.

The next chapter will explain it.

CHAPTER XII.

UPS AND DOWNS.

For him in time's depths still is fixt,
The web of black and white hue mixt.

SCHILLER.

ONE of our three guests, Mr. Hardman, as the reader will remember, has scacerly been mentioned since his arrival. This is strictly in accordance with the facts of our history. That gentleman had spoken very little since his arrival, therefore we have not been able to record his conversation.

If we must confess the truth, he would seem to have enjoyed his host's hospitality so heartily as to have become somewhat unsociable. He was fond of a good dinner, and the reverse of sentimental. Known to be rather eccentric, he was often left to his

own devices. His fits of taciturnity were allowed to pass by unnoticed; and when his fun and humour returned his friends always welcomed them.

So when dinner was over he just wandered into the garden, albeit not very anxious to go out into the cooler air. Country gardens, and especially old-fashioned country gardens, have usually little seats, moss-grown, or fantastic or rural, in the prettiest spots. Mr. Hardman was rather big and burly. He had quietly seated himself and begun to digest his dinner, when crash! went the seat, and its occupant measured six feet on the ground. He was literally what Homer, or the Odysseid or Achilleid Bard, calls a weight of the earth.

But he did not utter a sound. So far human nature could endure.

There were, however, as has been said, several beehives in the garden. One of these was close behind the very seat which now gave way.

In falling, Mr. Hardman's white hat, unfortunately, banged against the beehive, and disturbed the quiet members of the commonwealth. They were not long in holding a political meeting about Mr. Hardman's person. That gentleman was for the moment a trifle confused with his fall. For the time he forgot himself, and made a desperate reach at the buzzing busybodies. His hand was pulled in at once with something like a shriek. His friends were with him in an instant. "Thieves!" "Bind it up!" "Loose the Dog!" and the usual cries served not to discompose him again. All that he could be prevailed on to say was this oracular utterance:

"Moonstruck and moonlight go together." He did not explain his meaning. In fact there was not time; for Mr. Phraser offered him one arm, and Mr. Stockbridge another; and under their care he was taken to the kitchen.

Under the charge of Betsy, the cook, he soon recovered.

Betsy was acquainted with all sorts of remedies for everything, from a sprained foot to a whooping-cough. Her bandages soon made Mr. Hardman's pains diminish.

But she had rather a sharp tongue, especially in dealing with her subordinates. She had with difficulty refrained from telling Mr. Hardman what an awkward man he was. But when he was gone she could no longer restrain herself. So she allowed herself a very unusual step. She actually went into the second-best kitchen, and took into her conference John, the coachman, and Jane, the undermaid.

"John," she exclaimed with a wheedling smile, "I don't mind if you draw me a drop of the new 'eighteenpenny.' You've been working 'ard to-day."

"To be sure it will do us good, for it makes us busy when master has his frens."

"Jane, Miss, take the pitcher, and look sharp."

Jane disappeared.

"But I say, John. Did you ever? What *will* people say? Poor Mr. 'Ardman though, he *was* stung."

John drew the settle into the corner, and crossed his legs comfortably.

"Why; and it served him right. A-sitting down on a beehive top! He might as well doze on a limekiln."

"No, but John, I tell you what *I* think."

"Well?"

"*I* think that if all master's friends were as honest-looking as him, I should like them better."

"Now, then, cook, don't be making of suspicious carracters. Phrasy or Phrosy, or whatever his name is, you know he is the family lawyer. And Stockbridge is a parliament gentleman."

"Oh; it isn't the parliament gent that

I've anything to say about. Not I, indeed! Though they do say as how he looks sweetly on young missy. Why, law, Jane, what a red face you've got! Have you drawed the barrel full in that there pitcher?"

"It's my opinion she's seen a rat in the cellar," John observed; "she looks so flustered."

Miss Jane cast a look of indignation from one to the other, as if she were undecided whether to leave them with a toss of the head. At last she observed,—"Oh, dear! how proud and suspicious we are becoming. See if you get anything for it. If I like to tell, I know something. Yes, about these *new people here!*" (with a little scream).

"Well, what I says is, the beer 'ill cool if you don't let us hev it soon."

Bacchus opens the hearts and smooths the brows. The difference which threatened to arise was dispelled, when the jolly god appeared.

"Well, I hope they'll be gone by to-morrow," cook said.

"You're wrong there. Master's ordered me to have the phaeton ready. They're going to have a day's pleasuring to-morrow."

And John took a deep potation of the foaming beverage.

"Where are they going now, John?"

"Right up Donnerberg, a good eight miles."

"Oh, indeed! Then you'll have another day of it."

"Poor Mr. Hardman, though!" said Jane, not wishing to be excluded from the conversation. "I'm sure he frightened master and Mr. Phraser."

"Why, what were they talking about, Jane?"

"You don't surely think I should be so outlandish as to listen. But as I was a-clearing up of the dining-room, some words

came in at the window, and of course I heard them."

"Of course. What did Mr. Phraser say?"

"Why, they were talking in a very low tone."

"Oh! they were, were they?"

"Master seemed anxious rather, and Mr. Phraser was asking him a good many questions. Whether old Mr. Walrond was living or not, and if he had made his will yet? and master was jist telling him where he lived in East India or somewhere, when the poor gentleman lamed hisself."

"You're an impertinent hussy for listening. That's what you are," said cook, bouncing out of the kitchen.

Poor Jane had to digest her indignation in silence, for John had no more time to lose.

CHAPTER XIII.

A DAY'S OUT.

But Scholar, have you nothing to mix with this discourse, which now grows most tedious and tiresome?

IZAAC WALTON.

MR. PHRASER left early next morning, having, as usual, important business to transact. The rest of the party, by way of making up to Hardman for his accident, went an excursion to the romantic neighbourhood of Donnerberg.

The place named was some eight miles off. As the occupants of the vehicle were brimful of spirits and country air, the day promised to be a pleasurable one. John, the coachman, was less important than he expected to be, for he was left at home, greatly to his disappointment. "But a

phaeton will only hold four," his master had said.

The latter therefore took the whip, and Mr. Hardman the place of honour by his side. Stockbridge, perhaps to his satisfaction, was left to go behind with Mary. Hardman was the first to open the conversation.

"Upon my word, the sun blazes hot for September. Moonstruck last night, sunstruck to-day."

So he pulled over his eyes his white hat, rather the worse for the collision, and, lolling back in the seat, burst into a hearty laugh, which made his companions smile. He was always in such good spirits. Then, observing Langholme's sober countenance, he feigned a preternaturally grave look about the corners of his mouth. This made them laugh more than ever.

No wonder, however, that Mr. Langholme looked serious. He rarely handled the reins himself; and his friends were going over a

steep and dangerous bit of road. The resolve to be cautious, together with a natural feeling of dignity as head of the party, made him turn several reproving glances at his flippant companion. The latter was all the merrier.

By degrees they got into a steady trot. Mary now and then pointed out the objects of interest to her companion. It was so rare for her to have beside her an intelligent gentleman whom she could appreciate, that she became quite exhilarated. So did Mr. Stockbridge.

The scene was inspiring. For miles and miles stretched away the purple moorland, broken here and there by a black streak of a running brook, or a heap of peat, or a wild mountain lodge.

There was a sense of sublimity, such as people feel when they suddenly come upon the mighty sea.

For miles the carriage-road they were

taking descended along with the purple heath and blue harebells. Then there was a pretty toll-bar. A bit of jessamine, and a white rose, and a large Virginian creeper climbed up the wall. The garden was full of bright red flowers.

Another road turned off to the right, and might be seen winding away in the distance for a good seven miles.

"A wildish spot in winter, this, Stockbridge," said Hardman, turning round suddenly, and interrupting a pretty speech.

That spot was very wild. The brawling stream they were passing had, three winters ago, been the scene of a terrible catastrophe. Just there a belated carter had been lost in a deep snow-drift. His handkerchief had been found here; his wagon was rent to atoms, some three miles off; but of him nothing had since been heard.

The party shrugged their shoulders, as the friendly driver told them this little episode.

The character of the scenery began to alter. On one side, reaching up to the sky, tier above tier, were fir-trees, with deep autumnal foliage waving slowly in the breeze, and to the solemnized spectators expressive of grandeur and durability. On the other side, sixty feet below the road, was a torrent, already swollen with rains. You could hear its roar, now distinct, now blending with the sullen swell of the pines. The other side of the stream was backed by a massive wall of rock, varied here and there with holm oaks and ashes, that seemed to grow out of the solid stone. The scene would have been desolate enough, but for a little inn and hamlet nestling at the corner of the road.

Three miles further on was Donnerberg, one of the loftiest hills in that part of England.

Arrived here, the party prepared to climb the highest ridge—no easy task for the active and young. But who cares to see a

mountain, unless he can say that he has been to its top?

The first part of the ascent was pretty easy. Heather of about two feet high was the most serious obstacle. But the higher the party mounted, the steeper did the path, if path it could be called, become. What was worse—the sky was glooming over, while they were still a good mile from the summit.

At length it began to rain in earnest; But having mounted so high, our friends were resolved to gain the "real top." It now began to pour down more steadily, and the ascent became really difficult. The streams were changing to tumbling torrents; the ground every step was becoming more and more marshy. Each point gained served only to show them a further point still some distance from the object of their desires.

If the reader has ever heard the thunder rolling among any of the lofty English

mountains, he will feel for Mary as her heart beat at that sudden peal which seemed to come from the very depths of the rock she was treading. Yet she held up bravely. She dare not give her father pain; nor must she make an undue claim on her acquaintance with Mr. Stockbridge. And after all—the first sensation of alarm overcome—it was a grand sight to see the lightning quiver around, while the hills were shaken to their very base. It was as if Nature were enacting some solemn tragedy.

Then, in the intervals of the downfall, there would be a rift in the clouds; the prospect would clear, and there was a grand view, a view worth coming to behold, though of course very different from the one they expected to see.

On one side, they beheld the valley, through which they had recently passed, now smoking with mist, and heaving like some boiling lake.

On the other side, were ranges of hills piled on hills, while the glass could descry, far in front, the city of Cardington, with chimney, dome, and spire distinctly visible. Nearly at the foot of the hill a smaller town had a weird, unearthly appearance through the dark atmosphere.

In spite of the danger, which was now considerable, as well from the lightning as from the swollen brooks, the whole party could not help enjoying their novel situation. There was a sort of elation in their minds at the thought of their danger, of the stormy barrier which separated them from the world, of their being engaged in something different from men in general; and the foaming brooks, angry clouds, and sullen peals seemed to form part of another world than theirs.

During the descent they had to be extremely cautious. The ground was very slippery in several places. At one turn

round the mountain the path was half worn away, and wound along a crumbling slope; far below, the river was roaring with a dull, heavy sound; a single false step would have precipitated them into the waters.

Hence it was with a sigh of relief that the party at length saw before them the pretty mountain inn. For after all, safety is preferable to grandeur.

But the storm was still raging as fiercely as ever when they found themselves out of danger at the comfortable hostelry, before a cheerful fire, and a plentiful stock of provisions. Neither appetites nor spirits were damped by the privations of the day. The storm had quite subsided, when the party thought of returning.

The journey home was enjoyable enough, the weather having quite cleared up. There was a beautiful star-lit sky.

The dark moorlands shone here and there with a silvery gleam of water; occasionally

a rushing wing broke the still silence, and the distant heavens were aglow with the fitful splendour of far-off furnaces. Stockbridge and Mary seemed to see a deep mystery in that wild waste of moorland. Mr. Hardman was comfortably snoring when he reached Rossleigh.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN ENCOUNTER.

La prudence infinie,
Départ à chaque peuple un différent génie.
CORNEILLE.

THE town of Newstel, it has been said, was not handsome. In addition to the ugliness inseparable from an uprising and upstart town, it was built at an upward direction—on a hill. Its streets were so narrow, that you could almost shake hands across them, and they straggled up and down, like the hands of overgrown boys. Its fine shops were lost, from wanting room to display their fineries, just like the young lady jammed up in the wagonette the other day.

There were not many monuments erected to the fame of the great worthies of Newstel. That was curious, because the people who

lived there thought themselves, and their sons and daughters, far superior to the rest of the universe. But the shameful fact must be confessed, that the principal monuments in this flourishing city were lofty chimneys, some of which gave a splendid light in the night-time. By day, too, these were impressive. They struck the eyes like big facts, and they were something to think about. Some of them had been smitten by lightning, others had been blown down, others had been the scene of accidents in their building. The chimneys were, therefore, the most prominent and striking feature in Newstel.

There was just one monument—famous from its solitude, like a moneyed man who has kept single all his life—in the public square; it was raised in honour of a bottle-merchant who had become mayor, but its head had long since been broken off by the cads.

The "Square," so called by courtesy, was just large enough to allow two or three carts to pass. It was surrounded by dumpy, two-storied houses. Here and there were thin, lanky buildings, which made a pretence to something, and quite dwarfed the rest. It was a fine place for studying the painting of tradesmen's shops.

Neither the buildings nor the kind-hearted people of Newstel have induced us to drag the reader thither. But in any throng of men collected together, apart from the place or purpose of its gathering, there must always be something to excite interest. Swaying, noisy crowds stir up the energies. It is delightful (is it not?) to throw oneself into that heaving mass which eddies along the pavement, with its double line of human faces; to share for a time in the life of the passing crowd, and to feel a new vigour imparted by the sight of all its intense activity. It braces a man up for toil in

the back office, and perhaps he goes home to a loving face with a more cheerful countenance.

Look at the gentleman walking down the street! His expression is the reverse of cheerful! He is exceedingly sedate. He has a white waistcoat on, and walks with an air of becoming dignity. See! he bows politely to that thin-faced teetotaller, who is Deacon of Bezetha Chapel.

Poor little dog, there! a very pretty little Skye terrier it is. The gentleman has just kicked it into the middle of the road; he has evidently no time to attend to animals.

Of course, it is our friend Mr. Phraser, whose time is so very valuable. Whatever is he thinking about, as he hurries along? By our privileged position we can answer the question. He is just going to make a speech at the Town Council. He is thinking about that.

The meeting will be intensely exciting.

Every speech will be reported at full. And quite right too, for the town has just purchased several plots of land—a portion of which is to be turned into a cricket-ground. The exciting question is, "What is to be done with the spare part?" Some persons wished it to be devoted to purposes of recreation or amusement, but it was thought that they were in a weak minority, and Mr. Phraser had been waited upon by a deputation, which had, as they said, "quite other views." Mr. Phraser was "earnestly begged" to propose that the spare ground might be devoted to open-air preachifying.

He was thinking over the various heads into which his speech was to be divided. He was naturally fluent; his mode of public speaking was a good deal admired. He thought himself a good speaker.

His mind had now reached the peroration.

"In a word, Sir," he was saying; "if there be among us any moderation or piety,

or anything of that charity which covers a mult—"

Some one touched him.

When he saw who it was, he stood petrified in the midst of the crowd.

There was nothing remarkable about her, as you and I would think.

And yet his hair almost seemed to be standing on end.

She appeared to be a decent looking woman of sixty, or thereabouts. She had a pale, delicate face, rather a square massive forehead, with large piercing green eyes, and perfectly white hair. At first sight there was nothing very striking about her. But if you looked more closely, you would probably think that you would rather not see her again.

It was a face you might remember years afterwards in a dark night-walk across a solitary moor.

It was old Nancy. Her haggard look was partly the effect of deep troubles.

The lawyer did not like her appearance at all. It was some seconds before he recovered his voice.

People were looking queer, and beginning to nudge one another. What did *she* want with him? they meant.

At last he said,—"*You* here, Nancy? I thought you had left these parts."

The woman's lips seemed to move with contempt, as she answered,—"To be sure. But I thought I 'd come back again."

"Quite right," he returned. "And where do you live now, good Nancy?"

She held out her open palm somewhat abruptly—a thin wizen hand it was—and said,—"Never mind that. It 's not the first time you 've asked for my house. But it might as well be the last."

Without another word, Phraser placed in her hand some gold pieces.

The woman departed as mysteriously as she had appeared. Phraser was left alone in

the crowd. He wondered whether many had watched him. The incident affected him terribly. He drooped his head, walked with slack step, and appeared for the time ten years older. He saw no one. The minister of Bezetha Chapel himself, who had condescended to make the first bow, received no recognition — conduct which that gentleman had his own opinion about. Hockster, the clerk (half an hour late this morning) passed him unnoticed. However, there was still some distance to the Council Hall; and the lawyer had probably recovered his equanimity when he arrived there.

At all events, the *Newstel Chronicle* next morning had no fault to find with his oratory.

An extract from that newspaper, which had of course the largest circulation in the county, and was, no doubt, the best organ for advertising in that part of England, may possibly interest the reader more than a visit to the hall itself.

Some of the common councilmen (it wouldn't have done to tell them, though) were commonplace and prosy, and spoke funnily, but the newspaper was a distinguished literary performance; and, besides, you can read it the next day without trailing through the mud after it.

The first words that will strike you after unfolding its wet columns, in its new and handsome type, are to this effect:—

"The more worth the more wisdom. Men become ripe with age. If we require an absolute proof of our assertion, we have only to point to the admirable conduct of one of our councillors. Mr. Phraser is a gentleman of whom our town has just reason to be proud. We need scarcely repeat what he has done. Good deeds need no trumpeter. But for the benefit of some of our readers, we hope a small part, we may say that Councillor Phraser, as might have been expected from his fervent religious nature, has succeeded in appro-

priating the extra portion of our cricket-ground to occasional religious purposes. All honour to him! As for his detractors, and our contemporaries generally, they are a set of pert, paltry, petulant pettifoggers. We, in our columns, represent the wisdom of the wise."

No doubt they did. But the new and handsome type didn't act very well at first. Among other mistakes, the word "fervent" was printed "servent"; which some of the naughty detractors preferred to the right word. Another column contained the whole of the eloquent speech by the honourable councillor. But the reader is probably tired, having already heard the beginning of the peroration.

Suffice it to say, that Mr. Phraser's speech was highly applauded in various circles and circuits, he being now considered to have redeemed the pledge of his election, as the friend of Toleration and Religion.

But the little gentleman whom he had "cut" in the morning had his suspicions.

CHAPTER XV.

HUMAN TOIL.

The bright sun was extinguished.

BYRON.

Operumque labores.

VERG.

NANCY'S life had been a strange one. She had come into contact with many people, and knew more than any one else, though not very much, about that sad event, to which allusion has been made, in the life of Langholme.

In time the reader will learn what that sad event was. At present, we will follow her down the narrow passage and through the back lane into that little cottage, where she lives in a garret on two shillings a week.

A very small income that! But the accom-

modation was not of the best; her furniture, too, was poor, and her meals were often scanty. One blessing, however, she had, as compensation for her trials—her neighbours were at peace with her; the rough fellows about there rather liked her. Some of them regarded her with a kind of awe, for she was a bit of a fortune-teller. They never let her be annoyed or insulted. But it had not been so always. They were now afraid of her.

One of her neighbours is just coming out of the door. He ought to have been working four hours ago. But yesterday was Monday, a day which he always observed as a solemn holiday; in consequence he was never capable of much exertion the next day. He was in his shirt-sleeves, with a blue paper cap on his head. A clay pipe was, we regret to say, in his mouth.

"Well, Nan, out already? Early bird."

"Shame on ye, John Nicholson, idling again."

A friendly nod passed between them, and John, or Jonas, as he was oftener called, lounged along towards his work. His way took him through narrow cross-lanes, with broken windows, tumble-down houses, crooked windings, and shouting women and children. Here and there was a house charred by recent fires, or a window without panes, the glass having been broken in a street disturbance. Sometimes Jonas looked up at a house where merry wits were used to congregate, or shook his head when a stealthy Jew, or ragged, blear-eyed drunkard went by. But at last he had reached his destination. A curious place it was.

That long range of brick building, entered by a large wooden door, is of an oblong shape, with a sort of vast quadrangle in the middle, full of iron wheels, iron boilers, and

iron of all shapes and sizes. The various parts of the building cover some eight acres of ground.

The nine chimneys are as large as any in Newstel; some of them never cease puffing. The whiz of wheels is heard there all day long, and most of the night too. Thousands of workmen blend their voices with the rattle of engines and the rush of steam. Everywhere is endless hurry and motion. The whole place seems like a separate town, existing for the sole purpose of production.

But, listen! there is a rushing of feet towards that low-roofed shed, with its six curious funnels in the roof. Except for the constantly burning gas, and the fitful glow of fires, it is dark within. In the middle of the shed the ground is hollowed into a pit, where just now there stands a sort of barrel, into which molten metal is pouring. How bright and milky looks the rapid stream, as it flows down noiselessly! Don't touch it,

that's all! At last the tub is nearly full, and the spectators remove to a respectful distance. Slowly the metal pours out into its prepared bed, as gently as if it were the contents of the milkman's barrel uncorked by a street urchin. And see! it sends up a thousand sparks, which look like some grand firework. The workmen stand out in the glow, like the Chalybes of old at their ocean forge. Then all is over. The seething mass has to cool, and the place is dark again.

Jonas was leaning upon a rail as he carelessly watched the operation. To perform it successfully needed considerable skill; and the feat was often applauded by the workmen of other departments. Nancy had not been far wrong in calling Jonas idle this morning. He did not hurry to his work. He kept sitting down here and there, and lazily watching the processes going on in the different parts of his passage. Here

cannon-balls were being formed; not far off was a forge for anchors; there rail-rods were being turned; close by thundered a hammer that would knock a house down; in the corner a knife was quietly scraping off bits of solid metal.

Still the walk did at length come to an end, and Jonas stood up to his own work. But the time was now half-past eleven; he was not much inclined for work, he thought. So he was glad when twelve came, and he could have a bit of chat over his dinner.

He was a popular man in the workshop. His temper was jovial and pleasant, and the reverse of resentful; he was open-hearted, and known to be brave. Being rather a "word and blow" sort of man, he had more than once thrashed some blackguards, who had wanted to rob old Nancy, under the notion that she had money. He was always acquainted with the latest news in

local and public matters, and was, like most of his companions, an ardent politician.

So he sat down in the midst of an admiring circle. He might, but for his years, have been termed the Nestor of the debate; and among his auditors were plenty of gentlemen's sons—for workmen and apprentices all dined together; and he had an earnest, ready mode of speech, sometimes approaching to a rude eloquence, which made even the better educated like his company.

"And who's to be him, Jonas?" said a dozen voices at once: that is, who was to be the new Mayor?

This was a weighty question, the Mayor being the great man in Newstel.

Jonas looked round with a pitying glance, as he untied his provisions.

"Why, surely you know, mates?"

No one knew.

"Councillor Phraser, of course. His

speech on the religious question has made it certain."

"Oh!" said one of the circle, "and a very good man too."

This seemed the general opinion.

"Well," replied Jonas, "he has his friends, this Mr. Phraser; but he hasn't been among us above six years. And I'm not one of his friends. So now you know!"

They did, and a word from Jonas went a long way with them. It had often the effect of settling a man's place or character. It was equivalent to a testimonial.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LITERARY AND THEORETICAL CLUB.

When it (*The Rambler*) first circulated in numbers, a Club in one of the towns in Essex imagined themselves to be severally exhibited in it, and were much incensed.

BOSWELL'S LIFE OF JOHNSON.

We should be wary what persecution we raise against the living labours of publick men.

MILTON'S AREOPAGITICA.

THE reader must not lose sight of John Bowyer. He was during this time calmly thinking about his future prospects. He had to live in a garret, with his books for companions, and with writing for his employment. He only just managed to scrape together sufficient for his maintenance. It was hard work, not however unattended with the profit inseparable from self-culture. In

later years he used to regard this time as of great value to his mental development.

During this period he began to take part in the meetings of a society, which rejoiced in the name that heads our chapter. This society was wont to gather to itself, for the discussion of every conceivable subject, the rising and risen wits of Newstel. Hockster, who had been for some time making overtures of friendship to our hero, had at length won his confidence. He it was who introduced him to the club.

Bowyer thus became acquainted with other young men of his age and attainments, and in their company found his time hang less heavily on his hands.

To-night the members had met for the usual weekly meeting, and as the subject (introduced by Bowyer himself) was rather an unusual one, only the more prominent gentlemen were present.

The place of meeting was a large square-

room in one of the busiest parts of the city. It had mullioned plate-glass windows filled inside with geraniums and scented flowers. There was in the middle a large table with comfortable easy-chairs round. A cuckoo-clock in the corner told the hours.

The members had taken their seats when Bowyer arrived. At the top of the table sat the President—a portly, stout man, with ruddy complexion, and a suavity of manner befitting his lofty position. At the foot of the table was the Vice-Chairman, a tall, thin man, exactly six feet three, with a very narrow chest, and a little bit of a face that resembled a child's. His voice was as "thin" as his form; and altogether he was exceedingly like an elongated knitting-pin. He had a nervous way of twitching his arm, and looking from time to time at the Chairman, so that he appeared now and then like a knitting-pin in motion. He was an earnest student, and had a great reputation for learn-

ing. The worst thing about him was a way that he had of discussing the members behind their backs.

Sometimes he cut a man's throat with a whisper over a cup of tea at Mrs. Pryall's. But that was only on a wet day.

On the left of the Chair sat a middle-aged gentleman of athletic attainments—a Pedestrian and Velocipedist, who counted his walks by the fifty miles or so. He had a very decided air, and always delivered his opinion with great composure. But should a dispute arise, his voice was often heard in the street; he had been known to double his fist at the quieter members. He, too, was fond of discussing you behind your back.

That member busily writing is one who never sees the question, but always looks two miles beyond it, as you may tell by his absent expression. His frequent quotations from Shakespeare and "the lesser poets" are about the same distance from the point.

There are two silent members. One was some time back reproved by the President for persisting in his own opinion against that of the club. Since that time his utterances had generally been monosyllabic.

The other silent member boasted of Australian extraction, and wore a knowing look. He did not care to say too much about things, he said; but he could have shown you how it ought to be done, if he liked. You saw that from his face.

Again, there was one who would have been silent, and ought to have been, but wasn't. He had such clever methods of attracting attention! He could laugh very loudly. The sound was something like a hen's cackling, but a good deal louder. And as he laughed duly and truly whenever there was a pause or a more serious remark than usual, it gained much regard. Mr. Henniker (or Hencakker, as he was called behind his back, for the members were fond of discuss-

ing one another privately), would single out for specially loud address any person who appeared overawed by the august presence of the club.

"Mr. Smith, I saw a neighbour of yours this morning."

"Mr. Brown, Diddledum and Co.'s shares are at a discount."

"Mr. Johnson, I saw your *father* this morning."

The general silence told for Mr. Henniker.

At first our friend Bowyer was rather surprised at the consequential airs of the various members, especially as for a time each particular disposition was played off upon himself. But after convincing the gentlemen that he was not to be trifled with, he began to be regarded with a mixture of admiration and despair.

At last, however, the members have settled down for the business of the evening. This was, as Bowyer had suggested, the reading

of original compositions and translations. At this moment the tall Vice-Chairman is speaking in his piping voice:—

"The grey-eyed morn from pearly gates
Shines o'er the beauteous mead;
The cattle stand; the plough-boy waits
To take them to their feed.

"The dog doth bark both loud and long,
The horse doth neigh to boot;
The carter sings his morning song,
And shouts the crows to hoot.

"Heigh! for the farmer's life, heigh-ho!
To roam the farm-yard free!
Rid of the pins of life that so
Rend both my love and me!"

The Vice-Chairman read this poem with occasional action, and sat down amid prolonged applause. The pedestrian, especially, seemed enraptured.

"What I say," cried the latter, "is, that a simple poem, after the school of Wordsworth, is the right thing. In that poem, now, every expression is telling; the epithets are good,

the lines are neat, and there is not a word too much. A capital poem!"

He looked round with an expression of defiance. Bowyer, however, instead of quailing, only smiled, and said,—"Excuse me; but Wordsworth is never commonplace, and besides, there is a confusion of metaphors in the last line. 'Pins' don't 'rend.'"

"To be sure," said the little face on the knitting-pin, colouring deeply; "my first copy had 'Pierce' instead of 'Rend.' But I liked the alliteration. I do still," he said, meekly.

The next performance was Hockster's. It was a mere freak, a few thoroughly French verses of Molière:—

"A heart beneath love's sway,
Is ever tossed with a thousand vexing cares;
There's pleasure, many say
For him whom love and passionate longing wears;
But say whate'er you will,
Freedom to men the greatest pleasure bears.

Nay; greatest pleasure yield those tender flames
That make two hearts to live
In one intense desire;
One cannot happy be without love's aims:
Take away love's fire,
And life hath left but ill."

"French poetry," said Hockster, expatiating, "*is* poetry. It doesn't hide its meaning in a long rigmarole of words. It is always sweet and attractive. It takes men as it finds them, and sings about their natural feelings. It doesn't turn people into great overgrown boobies, who talk milk-and-water."

"I suppose you mean that German does so?" said Bowyer, ironically. "But on the one hand there is nothing more 'stilty' than your play, with its curious observance of unities in time and place."

"He! he! he!" from Mr. Henniker, engaged in conversation.

Bang on the table went the pedestrian's hand.

"D'ye see, Mr.—"

"So, when six o'clock came—" said the silent member.

"The less said about it, the better," from a corner of the table.

"Unnatural, why—"

"Not at all; it is just what I sh—"

"Says he to me, 'Cabbage-tops'—"

There seemed a general conspiracy to talk down Hockster; and his defence of the "unities" did not reach beyond Bowyer, whom, apparently, it did not convince.

"If you want," continued the latter, "a combination of simplicity and depth, I will venture to read a little poem of Knapp's, one that I have just turned." The Chairman swept the room with his commanding eye; and, silence being obtained, Bowyer took his turn.

"Son Almighty, Lord of Power,
One boon on me mayst Thou shower;
One that most of all I lack:
From Thy stores of mercy blest

Let sweet peace and quiet rest
Flow within my throbbing breast,
Breast that vanity doth rack.

"Thou around and ever near us
With Thy kindly words wouldst cheer us,
And no place but speaks Thy love:
But from underneath distressing
Tumult riseth, aye oppressing
Heart that seeks the gentle blessing
Thou wouldst whisper from above.

"E'en as Mary seated lowly,
I would yield my spirit wholly
To those heavenly words of Thine!
Hushed be pride and selfish will,
Soul and body, be ye still,
Come, O soul's-Friend, come and fill
Me with holy light divine."

He read, however, in such a low tone of voice, that he was badly heard, although his translation seemed to meet with general approval. One person, however, objected to it, as being neither hymn nor poem; and the silent member wished, he said, they had the original for comparison.

"Will any one else favour us?" asked the Chairman. A louder buzz of conversation intimated that no one else would. One or two members were looking rather nervous, like the young gentleman about to speak at the wedding-breakfast.

So the Chairman himself was willing to favour the company. "The trifle," he said, "had been thrown off in his leisure moments, just for recreation."

[The truth was, that he had yesterday banged the potato dish on the parlour floor because the potatoes were burnt. He had "thrown it off" to calm down his temper.]

He rose amid the usual applause, and read the following:—

"Love, unvanquished in fight,
Whom plenty and riches delight;
Who thy rest dost seek
On the maiden's cheek;
O'er the sea is thy path, and in cots dost thou lie,
Nor immortal nor mortal may pass thee by;

Thou warpest to deeds of ill
The souls of the just at thy will;
'Tis thou who hast fanned to life
In kinsmen unhallowed strife.
But the love-laden look of a maiden's e'en
Over monarchs and kings is victorious seen;
The goddess of love is a mighty Queen!"

"For my own part," said the Chairman, "I prefer the poet who wrote the original of that, to Molière."

"The subject of the two pieces is similar," Bowyer observed.

"Yes," he continued, with a benign look; "I have here tried to avoid two opposite defects, namely—"

But at this point of the meeting the door was suddenly opened, and a gentleman, devoid of hat, and mud-bespattered, was heard gasping,—"P-p-pl-please, p'lice!"

Perspiration streamed from his bald head. His legs swayed violently. He looked alternately from the floor to the ceiling. And he kept motioning in the direction of the street.

There was certainly a very curious rattling sound audible. It was as if thousands of persons were beating the pavement with heavy walking sticks. Whatever was the matter?

It turned out on inquiry that the belated member who had just appeared, had managed to excite the ire of a number of street boys, who had waylaid and "chivied" him. The gentleman was beyond the middle age and somewhat corpulent, and the attack had cost him a fall across a rubbish-heap and a bruise against the wall. The irritating cause was nothing personal. But the little boys of Newstel had always had a decided objection to "larnin'". of all kinds, and the Club had to do with "larnin'." And, moreover, that body had lately devised a fantastic coloured ribbon, which the young rogues considered an aristocratic attempt at "swaggering." The attack was, therefore, to vindicate a sense of wrong on two scores—

that such a society should exist, and that it should have adopted an external badge.

The poor gentleman, puffing and panting, was assisted to a seat, where, in a short time, he recovered.

This untoward event ended the meeting. The members dispersed in a body, several linking their arms together for the sake of protection. But the little boys now kept at a respectful distance, and the members were suffered to pass on their way unmolested.

From that time, however, these gentlemen acquired that reputation, which they still hold, of being not only learned, but ready to risk their lives for learning's sake. At their next *conversazione* they exhibited a clever picture, symbolizing their courageous attitude. The subject was supposed to be taken out of an old Greek play, or something of that sort. A vulture, representing the Club, was painted as gnawing away the gizzard of a lazy giant, intended for Idle-

ness personified. Is wasn't quite classical, one or two members told the artist. "But what difference did that make?" he asked.

Our two friends, however, only laughed over the *contretemps*, Bowyer pointedly commenting on the meek behaviour of these men, so valiant in debate. While Hockster observed,—

"What a 'goke'! I knew old Grumps would come in late, and I had a hand in setting the lads at him."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE COMING CONTEST.

Ruuntque effuso carcere currus.
VERG.

WHETHER Phraser would be the next mayor was a problematical event. At first there had seemed no doubt about it; but there was now another candidate, whose chances many preferred to the lawyer's. The new favourite, in addition to his riches and respectability, had an advantage over his opponent in one important respect. Instead of being a *novus homo*, or person but lately heard of in Newstel, everything was known about Mr. Guiltspun — everything about him and his family. His grandfather, as everybody was aware, had done well as a

barber; and his youngest son was still at boarding-school at Wastewell College. He was a thoroughly "decent" man, people said, and was especially beloved by publicans and Odd Fellows.

Between one of these two gentlemen the Town Council would decide within a few weeks. Guiltspun and Phraser were for a time on every one's lips.

Two ugly names, surely. And a very trifling affair in which to enlist a reader's sympathy. Who cares to hear about a paltry struggle for a magistracy in a provincial town? Now you *can* feel an interest in great struggles, on which mighty events depend, or in thrilling descriptions, or in scenes that make the flesh creep. Such things are worth reading about. But a bit of a contest in a place that doesn't exist between two people, one just named, and one with character still imperfectly sketched—what charms can that possess for any one?

We shall see. All struggles have a certain interest when both sides are thoroughly bent on victory. A battle between two armies, a fight between two prize-fighters, a race between two carrier-pigeons, great and small contests, do somehow succeed in arousing a reasonable amount of interest. And wasn't Mr. Phraser bent on victory in all his undertakings? On this particular one he was concentrating the full resolution of his flexible and powerful mind.

Mr. Guiltspun, too, was resolved in his quiet respectable way; and perhaps that had advantages of its own. A few weeks would show.

Then, as Mr. Phraser struggles for his darling object, it may be that something more of his character will be filled in, and the struggle may get more interesting, yielding a progressive increase of interest. In that way you may get to like him, or the account of him, a little better. You may

discover in his character unexpected features. You may also help to fill up the drawing, and put in some shades on your own account, which will be good practice.

And the struggle is not insignificant at all. It is for a great post in a flourishing city. It is for a position that people long for, conferring, as it always does in Newstel, both honours and emolument. It is for one of those coveted prizes that are to be found in the vast centres of industry where people are fond of fighting for its own sake, and care less to throw a covering over their feelings and rivalries. What is interesting is worthy of attention, as well in a wilderness of brick as in a wooded glen or a marble metropolis.

Mr. Phraser's weak points were his novel origin, and an uncertainty about his material "worth." Though Guiltspun was better off in both those respects, he was less regarded than his rival by professional men and good templars.

A contest for a mayoralty is usually decided in the council-hall, without very much regard to external considerations. But in this case, the chances and merits of both candidates were freely discussed everywhere. Most people supported one or the other. Bets were freely offered and taken about them. Several persons had been apprehended for fighting in the streets in behalf of their respective favourites. One gentleman had made an harangue on the question to fifteen thousand listeners. A greater than usual interest about the impending result was felt in a town where party struggles, as a rule, ran high.

Both gentlemen did their best for themselves. In this particular case canvassing was going on, almost as if a regular election were at hand. Ladies made frequent morning calls, and gentlemen bowed and scraped more than usual. Every kind of means, legitimate or not, of bringing influence to

bear upon the councillors, who would have to elect, was used. Mr. Guiltspun had just given a splendid entertainment, which was now the talk of the whole neighbourhood. He had invited friends and enemies alike, and had made a most lavish (not to say pretentious) display of his wealth. His dinner had been served up on gold plate. Every one spoke in high terms of his public spirit, and fitness for a certain office.

Mr. Phraser was not going to be outdone. Not he. Though he had no gold plate, his fine house, called Highton Manor, was adorned in the very best style. He would try to make up for wealth by his influential friends. He would invite his client, old Mr. Langholme, "and that lot," he said. And, on the strength of their name, other county families would, he hoped, come. His dinner-party should gather together politeness and intellect and good-breeding. These things had their own "value," even in a rude

manufacturing town. His entertainment, too, should be talked about. It should give him a push to the desired goal.

So the invitations were issued, and there was quite a flutter of expectation at Highton Manor. Who would come, and would the party be a success?

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DINNER PARTY.

Blest is he who exercised in cares,
To private leisure public virtue bears.
LORD LYTTELTON.

HIGHTON MANOR was situated on a hill overlooking the waving smoke of Newstel. This part of the town was separated from the poorer faubourgs by a lofty wall and iron palisades. A barrier between rich and poor was felt to be indispensable.

It was a grand house. Built expressly for Phraser with no end of rooms. It was luxuriously furnished. Pictures by the old masters, some of them rather doubtful, adorned the walls. Some of the best and cheapest efforts of rising artists were to be seen about. Sculptures, plants, articles of *vertu* were displayed

in rich profusion. Some of these had been hired for the occasion. There were luxurious chairs and gorgeous sofas. There was rich colouring and ancient carved wood. Everything was intended to show the presence of a man of refinement.

A crowd of gentlemen, in response to the invitation, were now in one of these splendid rooms. Mr. Phraser moved easily to and fro, and conversed with his different guests as affably as if he were in the habit of giving equally large receptions every day.

The county families had, unfortunately, been too proud to come. Mr. and Miss Langholme, however, and Stockbridge and Hardman were there. The remainder of the guests were people who would be useful in the coming contest.

A loud buzz of conversation is going on. Some plush footmen appear, and the guests troop off into another room.

Few ladies grace the scene. Mrs. Phraser has numbered some fifty years. She is older than her spouse; is plain and good-tempered, not overfond of society and ceremony, nor very clever with her *h*'s. But there was something good about that stout matronly face. Miss Langholme liked her better than any other inmate of Highton Manor. Three more ladies made up the complement on this occasion.

There was a maiden aunt of uncertain age, with large nose, thick gold chain, and grey eyes. There seemed to be "solid reasons" for respecting her. And the two Misses Phraser were there, of course. Kezia, the eldest, was quiet, pale, and dark, and had nothing to say. Amelia, the younger, was fair and fast, fond of riding, and good at slang; irrepressible in talk, and not at all bad looking.

The cheerful rattle of a knife and fork, or the clatter of plate and dish, is occasionally

heard. The hired plush footmen dance about anticipating wants.

Mr. Phraser's unlucky servant-man, however, contrived to upset a soup tureen over the knees of poor Mr. Hardman. But it didn't matter, the latter said with as piteous an expression of pain as if he had been stabbed. Not at all!

Everywhere animated conversation was going on. The large party was necessarily broken up into small coteries, each maintaining with itself a free and unrestrained interchange of ideas.

A well-managed dinner-party is generally a lively sight. Where everybody is free to talk, everybody of course finds something to say. Good-humoured ease and deference to others are discernible. The shy and taciturn come out of their shells.

This evening everybody was fluent, and affability reigned everywhere. The viands were rich and wonderful. Every dainty in

season and procurable by money adorned the banquet. And the pretty flowers and bright wax candles combined, with the glitter of plate and glass, to render the guests happy and cheerful.

And Mr. Phraser showed his usual tact in saying exactly the right thing to the right person. He knew how to put everybody at his ease. To close observers the host might, perhaps, have appeared a little too anxious to render the several guests sociable,—a little too nervous about his arrangements. But that might be only a gentlemanly desire to make his friends quite happy. It need not have been owing to any care or anxiety in his own behalf.

For a time the conversation was free and unrestrained all over the table. But at length there began to occur lulls in the noise of words. Guests were talking somewhat less freely with one another. Either subjects of discourse were becoming exhausted; or

there was some more engrossing subject which interested other coteries besides its own. Many seemed to be listening to a knot of speakers on the left side of the table. They were discussing those enormous frauds which had occurred.

"What frauds?" whispered Hardman (his knees still smarting from the hot soup).

"Why, those connected with 'Makemuch's Pebble and Drumstick Company, Limited,' of course," was the answer.

Some guests passed severe comments upon the managing director, while others thought the Chairman to blame.

"What do you think, Phraser?" Stockbridge asked.

The host took a modest view of the company, stroked his bald head, and for a time was silent. At length he spoke, though with manifest reluctance.

"If I may venture to give my opinion—"

"Do, do, now!" shouted several gentlemen at their loudest.

"Well, then, I should really prefer being excused saying this. But I am, indeed, afraid now, that we have to deplore—"

"Yes?" said Langholme, helping him on.

"To deplore a general loss of honesty, and a want of sincerity in society at large. I'm sorry to say so. I am, indeed."

"Oh! you're quite right," said one on his left.

"I really fear," continued Mr. Phraser, "that undertakings are sometimes floated in the full knowledge that they will be ruinous to people who embark their capital. And this is getting too common for inquiry."

"Ah! yes;" said a banker at the foot of the table. "England's commercial credit may suffer from bubble companies."

"Some people," said Langholme, "compare the English with the old Pœni. I hope England's credit won't become a *Punica fides.*"

"That was a by-word once, wasn't it?" asked a gentleman.

"It was, indeed. But the enormous frauds and failures of modern times are astonishing. Quite!" Langholme said.

There was silence for a few moments, as each person weighed the remark. One or two gentlemen were, perhaps, feeling uneasy on their own account. It was altogether an unpleasant subject for discussion.

The host must do something to put the guests at their ease again. But his words had the contrary effect. He uttered the first thing that came into his mind.

"The truth is, you know," he said, "that people are not educated in the good old way. When I was a boy, I used to be taught those plain truths, which in time make men good citizens."

There was no response to this remark, and another awkward silence ensued. The guests held various opinions on the subject of educa-

tion. Some preferred it to be quite secular, or, at least, thought that "non-secular" knowledge should be taught at home. Others were for mixing a little religion with learning, others had their own opinions about the proportions which the two subjects ought to hold to one another. While those who, like Langholme, coincided with Phraser's last remark, thought it inconsistent with the latter's position and known views at the Schoolboard.

Phraser felt that he had said a foolish thing. No one seemed willing to break the ominous pause.

At last Langholme, with true gentlemanly instinct, ventured to the rescue.

"What I think about education, now," he said, raising his voice—a sweet silvery voice, that always uttered sweet, gentle words—"is, that it has two faults."

This introduced a more general topic. A pale, thin gentleman in blue spectacles, who had evidently something to do with a

"widely circulating" newspaper, had been taking mental notes for the last five minutes, at least. He asked, in a censorial tone:

"Two faults—and what are they?"

"I think it is too mercenary, and too repressive."

The pale, thin gentleman made another mental note, but no reply. Phraser had by this time recovered. Not caring to endanger himself a second time, he exclaimed in a thundering voice:

"You astonish me, sir."

"Mercenary!" repeated a gentleman with upturned eyes, in the centre of the table. And "Mercenary!" went round from guest to guest, like a curious geological specimen.

"Yes, 'Mercenary'!" said Langholme, something irritated at the astonished and outraged looks cast upon him. "I mean, that so much learning is taught, or professed to be taught, for so much money. The money must be paid. That's essential. And

the lesson is pretty sure to be something about money-getting."

"You mean teachers want paying for their work. Of course they do," said Phraser.

"Of course!" echoed twenty voices.

"I never said they didn't or oughtn't to want," Langholme said. "But there is very little learning for learning's sake now — I mean apart from some material gain."

This was a propitious moment for Phraser's regaining his lost influence over his guests. He felt that all would agree with his next remark.

"In these days of ours," he said, "education *must* be practical. With all our employments, and all the competition for them, people must know their business thoroughly."

"I like a man who knows his business thoroughly," he continued with a look of assurance. "Now, I have at this moment such a young man in my office. I am often thankful for his practical knowledge."

The conversation was getting dry, and the ladies rose.

When the latter event had taken place, Phraser followed up the advantage he had won, and continued:

"You observed, I think, Mr. Langholme, that education now-a-days is repressive. You will find it hard to convince us that it is so, on the whole."

"Why!" said the latter in surprise, "I thought that was self-evident. But a truism to one is a paradox to another."

"I found out that once in the Highlands," said the banker. "Quite wearied out with a day's walking, at night we came to a wretched inn. Says I to the landlady, 'You've poor quarters here.' 'Deed if you are not satisfied, trot on,' she says. And she turned us out."

"But this is no paradox," said Langholme. "Education is mercenary, if it simply puts a living into a man's fingers, without

training his powers, or giving resources to his age."

"Then it is certainly mercenary now-a-days," Stockbridge interposed. "The popular lullaby at present ought to be something of this kind:

> "'Counting and Reading, Reading and Counting,
> Learn, darling, learn, unto Riches mounting!'"

"Such an education," said Langholme, resembles these dessert-dishes. It is placed with an object in view—to subserve a sweet taste. But the pattern of the dishes is most beautiful." And he examined a design of mingled grapes and peaches.

"There really is something in what you say," observed the banker. "Now, my nephew spent nine years at Wastewell College, and was considered very clever. He got a scholarship there and at the University. But I don't believe he would know whether the vegetables we have had were grown in the garden or made by the cook."

"Ha! Ha!" echoed the host.

"But in what way is our education repressive, sir?" the former gentleman asked deferentially.

"In this," Langholme said: "it stunts or ruins qualities which it should foster and develop."

"As how, friend?" interrupted Hardman, who had suddenly woke up from a snooze.

"You may bind the mind down too much. Many a young man is spoilt by that. A set course of reading is necessarily limited; and if a student has got it up well, he often cares little enough about abstract learning, his mind being warped to one course. While, if he fails in that particular course, he often gets a disgust for study altogether."

"Just so!" said the pale gentleman, for once agreeing with the speaker. "Give me this morning's *Times*, instead of all the works of Thucydides."

"But the trammels of system must have

their use?" suggested the guest with upturned eyes.

"I don't deny it. To work in one groove makes a man industrious and mechanical, but often deprives him for the time of every vestige of imagination or originality, and turns him into a walking-book. A system of reading glorifies its makers, but neither the writers nor the readers of the books read."

"There is something in that," said the banker.

"Of course there is. What of our great men? If they have undergone a system, they run away both from it and the seat of it. No great inventions were ever made by Canon and Rule!"

"Some of my own friends," said Stockbridge, "who have pretended to be 'thinkers,' haven't dared to call a thought their own, unless Bacon, or Comte, or somebody had thought it before them."

"Then do you mean to tell us that syste-

matic training is useless?" asked the thin gentleman, with another mental comment.

"Far from it. But it is a rough mode of measuring all sorts of minds. And it sometimes happens that one can't trust the men who make the system."

"But *you* aren't everybody," said the pale gentleman, with a look of disdain.

"By no manner of means," Langholme gently replied. "I'm only giving my opinion. Now, I'll tell you what I can trust!"

"He's volunteering his information. How very kind!" whispered the person with upturned eyes.

"Now I can trust this—a religious system made by some master-mind. One mind expressing itself for good in the world—that I do like. Oh! it is grievous," he said, with a look of sorrow. "One of our universities all but had this blessing once!"

The guests understood neither Mr. Langholme's meaning nor his earnestness. During

the utterance of his last opinion he had become somewhat warm. He was speaking testily after the manner of age. Of the guests some were politely silent, while others had begun to discourse on indifferent topics. Few were listening when Stockbridge observed:

"A mere system does, no doubt, cramp the mind. But that is, let us hope, rarer than you imagine."

On a sign from Phraser, the gentlemen adjourned to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XIX.

NOT A MURDER?

A mother chid her little brown curly child, because he stretched his arms, and turned his face towards the thorn-crowned captive.

OUIDA.

DEEDS of sheer cruelty are luckily uncommon. There is generally some sort of cloak or pretence for them. And whatever opponents of externals may say, do not let them give us naked evil.

There was plenty of the latter in Newstel. You would open *The Chronicle* some fine day, and a chill shudder would come over your nerves, and you would think of the forgotten poniard and bowie-knife. Men were blown out of their beds into the fresh morning air by the murderous breath of gunpowder;

streams of vitriol were thrown on the unwary; trains were upset for retaliation; passengers were pistoled even in fun; crimes were committed which, if narrated, would be deemed incredible.

During Mr. Phraser's party something not very pleasant had happened.

There lived in a back court near Withers's house, a very little boy with fair hair, light blue eyes, and as the poet says, delicate aquiline nose. A *very* little boy, less than most little boys, even in that court, and that is saying a good deal. He was thirteen, but did not look above nine years old. But he had such a beautiful tender face, and such a lithe graceful form, that you wondered how he lived in that court at all. He was like some fair flower in a solitary wild.

Surely he must have gladdened his parents very much! Was he their hope, and did they trust that he would sometime become a

good and useful man? Not at all. His father had now been three years in the lunatic asylum, where he had gone crazed with drink. His mother was one of the worst drunkards in the court, and only worked when she was obliged.

So poor little Charlie had to labour in the factory. He was not as strong as many boys at ten, but the law allowed it, and work he must. He had been toiling now for some months. His head ached and his back ached, and his eyes seemed blind often enough, when the day was over. But he did his best, or else his mother would have flogged him. When the week was over he gave his paltry wages to his mother; but on this particular day, he felt as if he could not work. His little head ached so badly when he got up at five, as he always did, to say his little prayers, that he fell flat on the floor. He lay there for a quarter of an hour. It was time to be off, he thought. It was a

long way to the factory, and the bell would ring at six.

He began to get ready, but oh! how his head ached. Would his mother let him stop at home for once? He would ask her, at any rate. The effort of seeking her made his head ring again. "Oh! my head!" he whispered to himself, as his hand pressed his burning temples.

The woman was sleeping away the effects of a heavy dose of gin. Very timidly little Charlie crept up to her, and then kissed her red bloated cheeks. That would awake her gently. She heard his words indistinctly; but she seemed to understand their purport, for she raised a brawny arm and struck his little face as hard as she could. He fell down again quite at the other side of the room. Oh! how his head was swimming!

It was half-past five, and there was only half an hour now. He must be going; but

there was no dinner for him to take to-day. Everything was eaten up. Oh! how giddy he felt as he tried to make haste along the deserted streets!

That was all he could think about. Would he be in time? The chimes sounded a quarter to six, and there was half a mile to go. He tried to run, but soon had to cease. There were only four streets—long ones, though—now; perhaps he would do it. No! six o'clock booms out from the big tower, and tinkles from the tall spire, and grates hoarsely from the grand town clock. It was six o'clock.

He could have been late, of course, and they would only take something from his wages. But that dreadful Overseer, who was always so stern! Who never did wrong himself, and was so cross when others did! Charlie had never been late, and he could not face that dreadful Overseer. Perhaps he would strike him, as his mother had just

done, and that would make his head worse still. Oh! how it ached.

But should he go home again? His mother would flog him soundly, perhaps kill him. No, he would wait till evening, when she would be at the public-house, as usual, and she would never know.

Poor little fellow! He never once gave it a thought that it was Saturday, his head ached so. But it was "pay-day," and his mother would want all the money for drink to-night. He didn't remember that.

So he thought he would go for once into the beautiful green fields that he had seen in the distance so often. They looked so fresh, they would do his head good. A kind milkman, too, gave him a crust and drop of milk, and that was a better breakfast than usual.

Oh! how nice it was to lie in those sweet fields! The harvest was late, and reaping was still going on. He could see

a wagon with four horses going about and collecting the rich yellow sheaves; and the men were all so happy in the fresh, open air. They sang songs, and did not swear at him, or kick him, but let him lie still. One of them gave him something to eat, and made him useful.

How sorry he was when evening came! The wagon was gone, the light was darkening, and he was all alone in the field. And now he had to go back into the black, smoky town. But his headache was better, and his mother wouldn't know.

Wouldn't she, though? She was waiting for him, and asked him for the money the first thing. Poor little boy! he hadn't any. So she beat him, and made an uproar, such as only women of her class can make. There was soon a row in the whole court.

Withers was sure to hear of a row, and he heard of this one. The lad had rebelled, and the little crying wretch must be punished

by authority. So Withers got hold of him, intending to give him a thrashing. But no! there was a better way of punishing him.

At the bottom of the lane was a horse-pond of some depth. He should be ducked. The rogue would think he was going to be drowned. It would frighten him well!

The proposal did not shock any one in the least. Little offenders, and big ones too, had been soused before. It was a good lesson for them.

So they formed a kind of procession. Withers was the first to emerge from the court, holding the child by the neck. Its mother stopped at home. The crowd gained bulk* as it moved, and at the water's edge there were about a hundred ruffians clamouring for the boy's immersion.

Poor little fellow! he was stupefied with

* Such a procession the author once met at the door of a place of worship just as the service was over.

fear, and did not know what was coming. Withers grinned, and put him down. The child was speechless, and stared at the brown water.

Then the ruffian took hold of him by the feet. He literally turned the child upside down, and plunged him head foremost into the water. He repeated this three or four times. Then he threw him down rudely on the floor. But the lad had fainted away.

Withers grinned, and departed, the crowd following. None looked back on the little boy, who lay silent as death by the water side.

But one man had stopped behind. He had a brown face, like a gipsy's, with rather a kindly expression. He took up little Charlie, and gave him a drop or two out of a bottle in his pocket, and brought him to his senses. Then he took him back to the court. "A nice mother!' he thought, but said nothing.

What had made him kind to the child? Perhaps not mere good-nature, for he had not been brought up in a strictly religious town, such as Newstel professed to be.

But he had once before seen a tender, boyish face resembling that, in suffering—the boyish face had been stolen from a large house somewhere, and perhaps he, or some of his old friends, had had a hand in it. So he pitied the poor child, and gave him back to his mother.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DRAWING-ROOM.

There is in souls a sympathy with sounds.
COWPER.

THE conversation at Mr. Phraser's party may have appeared to the reader somewhat dull. But even dull entertainments must be borne with resignation. Certainly the ladies were dull, who had retired to the drawing-room. But that might be—we shouldn't be rude enough to say that it was—because the gentlemen had not appeared. Perhaps it is a slander to say that ladies are always dull in the latter case. But they were at present.

It is just possible that they did not talk because they were engrossed with the beautiful works of art around. Some of these

were borrowed, but they were certainly very pretty. The drawing-room quite matched the splendour of the mansion. The walls were of pure white, without even a gilt border. Statuettes, representing symmetry or strength, reposed on brackets. A rich moulding, of Italian design, ran round the ceiling. There were pictures with bright blue skies and crystal lakes, and strangely shaped sails scudding about. There were rich cabinets of gems and valuables. There were all sorts of curiosities. Chinese ivory balls without seam, regiments of little silver soldiers that Queen Anne had played with; and a remnant of the very bowl that Sir Walter Raleigh had smoked before his gracious Sovereign. The very chairs and ottomans were graceful, their embroidery and woodwork recalling the leaves and boughs of beautiful tropical trees.

The room was some forty or fifty feet long. It was, indeed, more of a hall than

a private room. Half-a-dozen fine mullioned windows gave light. In the evenings, as at present, it was illuminated by the softened glow of the numerous wax candles in the chandeliers.

For none of these things did Mary Langholme care. Very companionless indeed she felt in that large, dreary room. She was sitting by herself. Just now the maiden aunt had snuffed her out in a conversation upon samplers, and she had retired to one of the three large fireplaces. There she was listlessly turning over the leaves of a photographic album. But a heavy care lay upon her, and she felt sick at heart.

Phraser's invitation had been accepted by her simply because her generous father had thought it rude to decline. For her own part, she would very much have preferred not to go. Of Mr. Phraser, especially since his last visit to Rossleigh, Miss Langholme had begun to feel a certain distrust. He

seemed to be a man of depth—far beyond her powers of fathoming. A very plausible manner he had certainly; he was popular, and had a great name with many, but he was one of those persons who would have chilled her to the backbone had she met him on one of her errands of mercy. His politeness and suavity of demeanour did not in her eyes at all conceal a something within which he was always vainly trying to cover—an unknown quality, or set of qualities, which made him exceedingly repulsive to her. There was that about the lawyer which Mary did not like; and a woman is often a good judge of character.

At the dinner-table she had had, silly girl! a queer fancy of being a child again. The reverie was all over in a minute. But how vivid were her feelings while it continued! The old days seemed to have come back again, and she was once more going out with the absent-minded old nurse, who had

been long under the green turf—it was that dark night when they met papa from the coach, and the black dog jumped up, and nurse let her fall—but this time she did not seem to awake in her father's arms. The next moment Mr. Phraser was delivering a rounded sentence, and the fancy was over.

And when she came to think of Stockbridge, her pulse beat faster. How good and handsome he was! And he was attentive to her too. But were his attentions exactly of that kind which was acceptable? He was a politician and man of the world. She had been brought up in ideas of the strictest loyalty. Was not he in theory a revolutionist, or unpractical "thinker"? At any rate, he placed in politics a lofty ideal, which she thought absurd and unattainable.

On the other hand, he was one who understood Phraser, and would defend her father. He was a thoroughly honest man, whom she could trust. And he was one,

too, whom—it was vain to conceal it—she really liked. An honest man's affection was not to be despised.

And her father was getting to that time of life when he would need a stay and support. "Noble old man," she thought, "how frank and open-hearted his countenance! What a contrast with that row of hard faces!" The simple statement of his opinion seemed to throw down a whole host of subterfuges and falsehoods.

Poor girl! she had still to learn that subterfuges are not always "thrown down" by candour. Occasionally, but of course very rarely, Mr. Candour gets a throw in the wrestle.

Meanwhile the ladies are speaking. But not in the most ladylike tones.

"It isn't."

"I 'm certain it is."

"No."

"I tell you, yes."

"What is that, dears?" asked the aunt.

"Never mind them, Susan," said the mother. "Let them talk it out."

To "talk out" disputed points had been the general practice of the young ladies. Miss Langholme knew what the matter was, having heard whispering across the room. The fact was, that Professor Süszersund had expressly forbidden his two pupils to venture on that duet from Gounod's 'Faust,' until they had gone over it with himself three more times. Both the sisters knew that one piece had been restricted. But Kezia maintained that it was a piece of Chopin's, while Amelia positively laughed in her sister's face at the ridiculous mistake.

So Kezia gave way, and it was resolved, should music be desired, to take the piece from the opera.

The gentlemen entered. Stockbridge seated himself near Mary. What would be the end of it?

Of all the pretty and interesting things in that drawing-room, the last two persons were the prettiest. How graceful Mary looked, with her auburn hair and laughing blue eyes, her firm little mouth and dimpling chin, her rounded form of slender symmetry, showing that womanhood had arrived with its joys and sorrows. And the member for Tindwich, thought the Misses Phraser, was well worth "setting a cap" at. His tall, firm, athletic figure; his manly, open face; his gentlemanly bearing, shone to advantage to-night. In conversation he was equally at home on all topics. But when he spoke with ladies, there was always a spice of extra politeness in his manner. His presence was on that account the more welcome in a drawing-room. The Misses Phraser were not the only ladies who had liked Mr. Stockbridge.

The latter sat together, while the gentlemen busied themselves with the artistic

treasures scattered about. The host spared himself no trouble in explaining the various objects of interest, without distinction as to what was borrowed, or his own property. At length the small-talk began to flag. There had been enough noise in the drawing-room. The gentleman in blue spectacles requested of the Misses Phraser the pleasure of a piece of music.

That piece was not to be without results on the fortune of our tale. Herr Süzersund had had his special reasons for urging his pupils to practise that piece of Gounod's under his own eye. The learned professor had paid attention to the faults and virtues, not only of the young ladies' playing, but of their dispositions. Hence he had arrived at a learned deduction as to their proper mode of playing in public. The girls, he knew, were of opposite temperaments, the elder being phlegmatic, the younger rather excitable. The professor had frequently lectured

them both as to the need of a real inner spirit of appreciation, which should unite them to one another, and to the master-spirit of the composer. He had even conjured them with tears.

The young ladies sat down, it must be owned, with some misgivings. The piece went on well enough at first. Before long, however, Kezia was playing more slowly, while her sister was getting more rapid. The time of the two was plainly different. The piece became more and more uneven. The gentleman in spectacles was looking over the shoulders of the young ladies, and pretending to read the difficult music. What was his surprise when he saw Miss Amelia Phraser shut her eyes, and positively play a false note? Poor girl! Sharps and flats were swimming about in her head without the least distinction. The gentleman did not know that; but very soon the crisis came. The two sisters were actually play-

ing a different bar. Even the unmusical, especially the agonized mother, saw something was wrong. With flaming cheeks and secret maledictions the two sisters retired. It was a sad ending.

"What a wonderful thing is music!" exclaimed Mr. Langholme, to cover the young ladies' discomposure. "In all our moods it suits us; and it even suggests to us thoughts."

"True," returned Phraser, raising the forefinger of his right hand. "True; but different thoughts to different persons. Twenty people will give twenty interpretations of the same piece, if it isn't explained to them by the composer's authority."

"But, on the other hand," Langholme answered, "a musician may be quite certain of exciting feelings in one direction or another, towards calm or sorrow or joy, for instance. The musician's command over the feelings is a mighty influence. This

implies, to some extent the suggestion of thoughts."

"Through the medium of the feelings and senses?" contemptuously queried the spectacled gentleman.

"Those are, I think, the musician's instruments. They are also the instruments of thought itself. The musician can but rarely address the thought directly, as an argument does. He must make a direct appeal to the feelings and senses, and reach the mind through them."

"So that music affects the senses directly, the mind indirectly?" said Stockbridge.

"That's my opinion," Langholme replied.

"Well; by whatever means," returned Stockbridge, "music gives us highly-refined mental pleasure. Miss Langholme, will you favour us with a piece?"

Mary could not refuse; but she hardly dared to be successful, when her friends had failed. She sat down, however, and played

one or two of the Songs without Words—that wonderful music, that carries the mind of necessity into a land of thought and happiness. A natural love of music Mary had always had; and she played simply and with appreciation. Under her gentle touch the composer's meaning seemed to reveal itself with power. Stockbridge admired not only the piece, but the player, more than ever.

"Sweet music! How is it," he asked, in the middle of one of her pieces, "how is it that thou takest us perforce out of ourselves, and makest us other than we were? We here are all elevated by the thoughts suggested by thee, and yet how have they come to us?"

It was beautiful. The undulating waves of perfect sound filled the gay room, and overflowed into the night. There was silence among the guests; and men below involuntarily stopped and raised their hats,

as they went on their way with softened hearts.

"Sweet music!" thought Stockbridge. "Art thou the best of heaven's gifts to miserable men?"

Far different, however, were the thoughts passing through the minds of the Misses Phraser. To the latter the evening had become long and dreary; the greatest pleasure *they* could have felt would have been to drop through the floor and not be noticed. At last, however, the party did end. And the Misses Phraser were hospitable enough to accompany Miss Langholme to the door.

One of them, however, had not gone from the pure spirit of hospitality. She expected to see a face there.

Perhaps she was not disappointed. Two young men were waiting in the hall when she got there. One of these was young Hockster, her father's clerk. Amelia had spoken to him once or twice before, and she

smiled upon him none the less graciously on account of her recent discomfiture.

Hockster pretended to have come on some business. But that need not have detained him so long in the hall. Perhaps he had a further motive. If so, he was probably gratified.

A friend accompanied him. This was one whom Hockster liked to patronize and astonish with the sight of his great connexions. It was his recent acquaintance Bowyer. The latter saw a certain young lady passing, and wondered whether goddesses still walk the earth.

CHAPTER XXI.

MESSAGE AND MESSENGER.

I hope nobody is ill at Lævestein?

DUMAS.

IT grieves us exceedingly to have to detail in our narrative anything but perfect happiness: or, at least, any event in which we are not sure that the patient reader will feel interest.

But we must at this point carry the reader a long way off. And we must try to gain his interest in an event which of itself is uninteresting. A certain personage there is, who cares but little about interest — he regards neither writer nor reader, and is entirely indifferent about proprieties. He knocks at our doors oftenest, when we least desire him. Let us then be impartial in our narrative.

Thomas Walrond, the weathy owner of Rossleigh, might in the natural course of things have expected a long life. India, however, proved very trying to a man of his constitution; and, after many threats, his health at last began to give way. The physicians, however, still held out hopes of recovery in case he sought England at once. Indeed, he was preparing to do so, when his malady received a sudden accession, which confined him to his bed. And the next news was that he was gone. Fever had set in, and the debilitated frame had collapsed without resistance.

To Langholme, and other old friends who still held their old associate in regard, the blow was a heavy one. But many heard the tidings with indifference, having long ceased to care about Walrond. And it must be owned that the latter's coldness was partly chargeable with this estrangement of feeling.

It was said that, while in India, he had

increased his fortune enormously. None but a rich man, indeed, could have lived at that mansion of his. It was called "Paraynas House." It lay close to the tall building with tapering spire, which you must know to be the cathedral. A splendid house it was—such as you find only in the East. Its forty rooms had every convenience. It was served by a complete army of natives. Its various comforts and luxuries were simply indescribable.

Not a person was to be seen about the square in front on that burning forenoon. And had any one ventured out, he would have thought the house untenanted. So closely drawn were all the blinds, so firmly were the shutters fastened, so devoid was the house of all signs of life.

But in one large room at the extremity of the building, there were, about the time when our chapter commences, several faces bending over the Englishman who had just

departed. And no wonder. Every one was sorry to lose a person of such intellectual power; and he was good-natured, too, when approached rightly. Nor was it often that an old fellow of a noble English college had lived out in India, mixing with the residents, and risking his wealth in merchandize. Walrond's loss was, in the place where he had taken up his abode, sorely felt.

Very anxious had been Walrond's last moments. Perhaps in his secret heart he had always regretted his hasty farewell to his native land, but he had, of course, expected to return; and he was far removed from his friend Langholme, with whom he would have wished to confer on many subjects. He would never see him again; and, besides, Walrond had always had the fancy —and now it returned with stronger power than ever—that his little orphan-ward was still alive. Though he had been lost out of Langholme's keeping, there had never been

any proof of his death. And this ward was his nearest relative, and would in the natural course of things have been his heir. About this and many another trouble Walrond had no one bosom friend whom in his last hours he could make his confidant, so destitute of real comfort was the end of this prosperous and envied man.

But he had gone the way of all the earth. Had you been there you would have seen the large front-door open. A black man, with white dress and fine flowing turban, might be seen coming forth with a parcel which has—the reader must be told—something to do with our Rossleigh acquaintances.

Strange events happen in the world. Are there such things as sympathetic connexions, and mysterious communications with kindred spirits?

The whole of that day, which was the next but one to Phraser's party, Langholme had felt far from well. When evening came,

he was too restless for study, and yet disinclined for sleep; about eleven he sat down in his easy chair. There were two candles on his table, and a fire was burning on the hearth.

Sleep had come at last after his restless day, but it was a strange sleep. He could see everything going on. There was no one in the room when he sat down in his chair; he was sure of that. But what is that slamming of the door?

No; it is nearer than the door. Surely some one is speaking. And yet there are no words. Only he feels, as it were, a violent effort as of some one trying to be understood. There *is* certainly something in the room with him. Is it a rushing sound, or a moaning which appeals to his heart. And then there is a long silence. The candles and fire have both burned out, but he feels, as it were, rivetted to his chair. Again, there is a something as of one very near him. Now

he thought the whole house was alive and speaking to him; now it is as if some gentle friend were there. Still there are no words. Only now and then there are the dim lineaments of a loved face, of something long lost, of something black that blots out all; then there was a warmth and light diffused over all.

"Father, dear, still awake?" said Mary, coming with a light into the dark study, "why it is half-past one o'clock."

The old man's face glowed with delight as he saw his dear daughter. With a mild reproof for her undue anxiety in his behalf, he retired from his cold room.

But a sudden alarm had struck Mary.

"Poor father," she thought; "he begins to look feeble long before his time. Surely he must have some great care on his mind."

He *had* something on his mind. The rest of that night he was thinking of his old friend Walrond, and of others who were dear to him.

But that active servant does not mind the heat at all. He hurries on with his parcel, occasionally meeting groups of Englishmen and natives; he threads his way exchanging a word with scarely any one, till he comes to the broad waters of the Hooghly whence a ship will shortly sail for Aden. It was a transport ship. But as it was immediately starting, it promised a quicker transit than the regular mail.

The letter was safely lodged among the soldiers. But both it and they had nearly failed to reach Aden, and then the course of this narrative would have been different.

On the second night after leaving Calcutta, the captain of the Undine was found wanting, just at the time when the first-mate was anxious to ask him a question about the signal-lights of a distant ship.

The captain, however, was not in his cabin. But next door to that was a small room, rarely used except by the mice. Here

he was found lying on his back in utter intoxication, with a lighted candle tightly grasped in both his hands. No catastrophe occurred. But who would have told us of the circumstance, if the Undine, with all on board, had been lost?

However, the parcel managed to reach Aden, passed the Suez Canal, crossed the Mediterranean, broke down in a railway accident near Rome—a beam, no one knew why, had been placed across the line—passed through France, and at last found itself in London. There we will leave it till the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXII.

COMING.

Endless days
And nights time measures in its endless course.
SOPH.

THERE are writers of fiction, who suppose their readers to be happily oblivious of space and time. To Barbary or Australia they transport them with equal indifference. The slipping of a few months or years makes not the least matter. The patient reader is to be kind enough to use his imagination. In any case the book will end happily, and all persons will be satisfied.

For our own parts we have never been able to delude ourselves into such a happy forgetfulness of life's conditions. To us a month is a month, although it should be slow

and dreary. And many months are dreary enough.

So dreary and uneventful that they are not worth writing about. There are periods when life moves slowly, and not much can be said about it. Periods when life is concentrated in an inner history, which cannot be transferred to paper. Such periods are like the Newstel Saturday afternoon, when everybody is resting.

Of this kind was the short time in our narrative during which the post was coming from India. Every one was going on in his usual course. Langholme at his studies; Hockster dreaming of wealth, Phraser of municipal honours — all were keeping to their old ways. But the arrival of that post, strange to say, seemed to accompany or introduce a fresh condition of things.

A letter and copy of the will were directed to Mr. Langholme, while the will itself, with another letter, was sent to Phraser's office.

The morning's post, as usual, reached the latter place at nine o'clock. This was one hour earlier than the lawyer generally appeared. But to-day the postman had the pleasure of delivering letters and packets into the hands of Phraser himself. The latter was not at all surprised at his large parcel. He knew exactly what he had to do.

He held it very carefully, and took it upstairs into his private office. His clerk, Hockster, was awaiting him there. Hockster was certainly a very useful young man.

Some conversation had apparently been going on before the arrival of the post. It probably referred to the parcel just received, for Mr. Phraser laid it down on his high desk, simply remarking, "It's here."

"We must be quick," the other replied. "I dare say he'll expect you to-day. Of course he knows about it."

"Do you think so?"

"Most likely he would have a private

letter: or a telegram, perhaps. But we shall see what our letter says."

There had been no telegram. But Langholme had already heard of Walrond's decease. He had said nothing, however, knowing nothing of the destination of his property.

"Can you do the *g* and *w* yet?"

"Exactly."

"Now for it then."

The blinds were drawn, the door was locked, the gas was dimly burning, specimens of handwriting and pens were strewn about the desk. You might have heard the beating of the hearts of both those pale men, as the blue wrappers were torn open, and two papers fell upon the desk.

"What did they say?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CLOSED OFFICE.

Then 'twere well
It were done quickly.

SHAKESPEARE.

WHY, it may be asked, had Hockster been taken so deeply into his master's confidence, that such an important and secret matter could not be done without him? Lawyers, it must be replied, have ways of their own, and the world can't always fathom them. And Hockster was clever, and a man of penetration; perhaps he was indispensable to the transaction.

At any rate, there he sits now at the other side of the desk, holding in his hands one of the documents already spoken of. Phraser is standing and reading over his shoulder.

The last will and testament — for such the document purported to be—of Thomas Walrond, of Paraynas House, Calcutta, and Rossleigh Grange, near Newstel, England, Esquire, among other provisions, bequeathed a great amount of property, goods, and possessions, together with all that estate of Rossleigh Grange, heretofore named, to Edward Langholme, for the term of his natural life, after which period they should accrue to the daughter of the aforesaid Edward Langholme, together with all the other property, heretofore named. The remainder of the will was occupied with a statement of the whole of Mr. Walrond's property, which had, it appeared, very largely accumulated. The bulk of it was left to other friends and relations, who will not pass across our scene. A part went to various objects of interest and charity.

All this was very carefully read in the closed office. Then there was the other

document. This was the letter accompanying and explaining the will. It was from Walrond's lawyer in Calcutta, and stated that a copy of the will had been forwarded to Mr. Langholme in order to prevent mistake. The lawyers apologized for sending the will without previous notice. But they had thought it the safer course to avail themselves of the quickest mode of transit.

This letter—reasonable and necessary as it must appear—seems to cause the two men no little anxiety. When they had read it they exchanged no few signs and nods.

At last they had made up their minds.

"We must get that copy," whispered Phraser. "It's no good altering this till we've got it."

"You see *her* name isn't mentioned, luckily," said Hockster, pointing with his finger to the omission.

"Ah! I hadn't noticed that."

All was perfectly still in the office. The

two men were calmly thinking over their plot. You could hear the dray with steel bars clanging and banging on its way to the factory.

Then you might have heard the scratching of a penknife on the parchment. It was Hockster's knife. A name was being erased.

The reader may guess whose name that was.

It was the name of Edward Langholme.

But whose name was being substituted with such wonderful neatness and dexterity? The reader will be none the wiser if we tell him.

Instead of Langholme was substituted Garthwaite.

The reader is none the wiser for this information. Nor would he have been if he had searched all the directories in the kingdom. Who was this Edward Garthwaite?

The narrative will at the right place give a hint, which the intelligent reader will understand.

But when the name was written, the two men breathed a long-drawn sigh of relief.

"Now it is done," said Phraser. And he folded his hands and walked across the room.

"Only half done," returned Hockster. "We must get hold of the copy. And quickly too. For the old man will soon expect us."

Phraser returned to the table. He had, during the excitement attending the alteration of name, forgotten — what his letter told him—that a copy of the will had been sent to Langholme.

Nor had his companion had time to think about it. The latter's whole attention had been directed to the task of erasure and amendment. But now both men perceived that they were in a difficulty.

The fact was that, during their conversation before the post, they had not calculated on Langholme's seeing a copy of the will. Had they weighed this information suffi-

ciently, they would have been less hasty about the erasure.

Phraser began to wish the name had not been substituted.

Supposing Langholme should find it all out! Then there would be exposure and ruin.

Hockster might, perhaps, get him out of the difficulty. But was he quite to be trusted?

And the master stole a side-glance at his clerk.

Hockster, he thought, was in his power. But if he should turn traitor!

His face was white as ashes.

The young man seemed to see what was passing through his mind. He quietly observed, not without a touch of contempt:

"Everything is for us."

"To be sure," said Phraser, with a tremor in his voice.

"Yes; the fools have sent us the real will. Had ours been only the copy we should have been done for."

"But I'm afraid we can't quite—" said Phraser, hesitating.

"Quite, what?"

"Quite convict them of forgery before an ordinary jury."

Hockster smiled as he rose and approached Phraser, into whose ears he almost shouted:

"No, no. Not that. We must say ours hasn't come yet. That we are so sorry, etc. Then we must get hold of theirs and *burn* it."

"Ah! to be sure. Can we do it?"

"Of course we can. I know how."

He was a young man of resources, and probably did know how to do it. At any rate Phraser must trust him.

So the papers were laid aside, and the office was tidied. The two men engaged again in their ordinary avocations.

Hockster would have a busy day.

His master had to attend a meeting about the religious use of the cricket-ground to-day. He wished also, if he could get it in, to pay a consolatory visit to Rossleigh.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A VISITOR.

How beautiful they stand,
Amidst their tall ancestral trees.

MRS. HEMANS.

AUTUMN was always pretty at Rossleigh. But the autumn of the year to which this narrative relates was remarkable. There had been a sort of second summer, in which, without the sultriness of August, the tints and splendours of summer had been protracted into the later season. The fields about there had been already reaped, and were bright green, while the foliage of the trees was that grand, deep colour which speaks of fulness and maturity. The hedges here and there were loaded with cheerful clusters of hazel-nuts. The elms at Rossleigh were very fine. They were strictly

"immemorial;" no one had any idea of their age. But how noble they looked that autumn! With their great branches lifted far above the grey old walls of the mansion, they seemed to take a pride in contrasting their deep green with the azure sky—a contrast varied again directly by one of the pigeons as it fluttered its white wings against the deep background.

Everybody had noticed how beautiful the flowers were that year. Especially the red flowers. Many of the old trees in Rossleigh garden were covered with wreaths of creepers; and where the great tree-like ivy prevented that, there were often festoons from tree to tree.

Along some of the walks there were covered archways, composed entirely of white, red, and yellow roses. Against the house-wall grew a fine Virginian creeper, now one mass of deep beautiful red.

All this was very delightful. The various

colours of flowers and leaves and fruits (there were apple-trees and luscious plums in the old-fashioned garden); the sunlight playing through the twinkling foliage, the peaceful garden, the old hall as it were keeping watch, the proud peacock strutting about—all this was very charming to Mary, as she read some of the Divine Comedy; and the birds seemed more melodious than usual. There was one skylark that rose far above her head, and poured forth a flood of song sweeter than any she had ever heard.

Now and then the old rooks *would* have their caw from the towering elms. But even they did not sound harsh. An old rook near a venerable mansion seems to lose something of its hoarseness.

There was one copse, too—almost the most northerly point so favoured—which at night literally resounded with the songs of nightingales. Here, too, were thrushes and linnets, which this morning were making Nature's

own music. The garden seemed for a time the perfection of beauty. Sights, sounds, pleasing scents, combining with the warblings of birds, and the charm of a peaceful mind, did, indeed, make that forenoon a memorable one to Mary. Altogether it was a picture, she thought, fit for fairyland. The little white lap-dog at her feet closed its eyes in evident acquiescence with its mistress.

Would that a thing of beauty could, indeed, be a joy for ever! But the time would come when this fair scene would be changed beneath a grey sky and bleak east wind. Before many weeks the early frost and driving shower would have brought all this beauty to sadness. Let us hope that the sadness would not reach the inside of the mansion.

That gentle old face approaching Mary is surely her father's. There he is. See! he is strolling carelessly along the grass in his morning-gown. He has got the London *Piecemeal* in his hand, and a bundle of letters

under his arm. There he is, quietly creeping up to her, intending to give her a mild surprise.

He has reached the wooden green seat where she is sitting in her white morning-dress, when, lo! he has dropped one of his letters, and she is startled. Miss Langholme is evidently one of the sensitive kind, as you may see, while she rapidly turns round with a gesture of alarm.

But her father's face soon reassures her.

"Listening to the birdies, Mary, dear?"

"No, father, to your mower there. I heard him sharpen his scythe three minutes ago, and he hasn't done a stroke of work since."

"I have no time for him now, dear. Ah! how you remind me of your mother this morning. She had just that gesture of the neck, when a little hurried. I could imagine she was sitting there instead of you."

"How charming it is this morning," he continued. "I feel quite young again."

Mary said nothing. But she took an affectionate and anxious glance at her father's face. She had been very anxious about him lately. Nor did his manner to-day re-assure her. She could not help thinking about the remark of one of her aged friends in the village almshouses. The old lady had told her that, "Shoo liked na' old men to get young agen, and be a pratin' o' green fields; shoo did na' like it." But the remark, Mary hoped, did not apply to those persons who possessed gardens and green fields of their own. So she dismissed the thought.

"What are you thinking about, love?" asked her father. "You must be learning some Dante by heart. Now you must be serious for a while. I want to speak to you on business. Hallo, that's a partridge!"

"Is the business about that, sir?"

Now, to do Miss Mary justice, she was not one of those gushing young ladies who hate the sound of the word "business." If we

must confess the truth, we would rather have trusted her judgment on many commercial and monetary transactions, than that of some lords of the creation who read the Share List daily. Small savings had often been entrusted to her keeping by her aged friends and others; and she had always taken care that these were administered in the very best way. Some of the poor ignorant people fancied that it was by some magical process that she increased the little stores committed to her direction.

Thus her father was not afraid of alarming her by the mention of the word "business." When the partridge had flown away over the yellow rose-tree by the far wall, he continued:—"I told you yesterday that I had learned of the death of my dear friend Thomas Walrond, and that I thought he might possibly have left us in the possession of that property which we now enjoy."

"Yes."

"I have since found that my supposition was correct. A copy of poor Walrond's will has reached me from Calcutta. The real will, it appears, has been sent, or will be sent, to his and my lawyer's."

"To Mr. Phraser, father?"

"Yes child, of course. Whom else could I mean? Sent to him I say, and when he and I have compared our two wills, no further steps will be required. I shall end my days in the happy thought that provision is made for my daughter."

"Pray don't give that a thought, father. But I do consider that you deserve this at the hands of your oldest and most cherished friend."

"Fiddlesticks, girl! But the letter I dropped was from Mr. Phraser, saying that he had heard of Walrond's decease, and that he would do me the favour of a visit to-day."

"I dare say he has a reason for what he does. But I don't think he need have taken

up his valuable time by coming here. You could have seen the will in his own office."

"A man as trustworthy as he is, is sure to do right. Lawyers prefer doing things in form. Let us go to the gate and await his arrival."

They went down the carriage drive. The aged father was leaning on his daughter's arm. Mary looked the affectionate child she was, and as one whom a father could trust for her loving care. They reached the garden gate. It was a large oaken gate of five bars; it swung between two large stone pillars capped with balls. On either pillar was a space, where the late owner's grandfather had chiselled the family arms. The Walrond motto read, *Murus circumstat Dominus.*

Just outside the gate was a bit of waste common land, which every one claimed and nobody owned. Here a troop of gipsies were encamped. Five swarthy faces (two women and three men) were sitting by the camp

fire, apparently discussing some subject in their own tongue. When Mr. and Miss Langholme closed the gate, the gipsies ceased talking; they all took a calm and, as Mary thought, an impertinent stare at the father and daughter, before resuming their conversation.

The two latter then walked to the top of the road, whence they had the prospect already described of the valley below. But, this fresh autumn morning, it was very striking indeed. Close by was the ivy-covered church tower; it was just chiming the quarter to eleven. All about it lay the pretty white village. Then there came the long greensward, the bubbling stream crossing it, some walled fields, and the river below with the white coach road. Directly opposite the moorland extended, with its rocks and rugged barrenness; and there were the waving woods with their pines, and oaks, and ash-trees.

But they have not long to wait for Mr. Phraser.

CHAPTER XXV.

A LUNCHEON.

Hearts good and true
Have wishes few.

FABER.

THAT gentleman must be the lawyer. You can tell that by his white waistcoat and benignly-important air and brisk step. Yes, it is he. How well he looks this morning! How hearty and open is the shake of this plain English gentleman's hand.

"Good morning, Mr. Langholme," he exclaimed, in a rich sonorous voice. "Good morning. I wish a few more of my friends lived in such pleasant weather and quarters."

"Good morning to you, Phraser. I am sure we are much obliged to you (eh, Mary?) for giving us your time when you are so

busy. Have we to congratulate you on being Mayor of Newstel, sir?"

"Ah! my good friend, the choice hasn't been made yet. I may tell you," he said, lowering his voice, "that a person has a very good chance besides myself."

"Ah, well! if the town does not know its own friends, it can't be helped, Phraser. Ingratitude, you know, is the penalty of our public men."

"Between ourselves, Mr. Langholme; though, of course, this is confidential—'

"Oh! of course."

"Between ourselves, I have very little faith in municipal bodies chosen by the public vote."

"Indeed! I thought you were on the popular side."

"Why, so I am. That is to say, I call myself by a certain name, you know, Mr. Langholme; but if that means that I am to be the friend of all the noodle-pated fellows

chosen into a town council—not if I knows it!" laughed Phraser.

"Ha! ha! You are facetious," said Langholme, with something of an anxious look. "Well, our fine country air has raised your spirits."

They had now reached the Hall of the Grange. The portraits of the noble men who had lived long ago, were the delight of Langholme, as they had been of Walrond before him. Their manly, honest faces had nothing "chipping" or compromising about them; their principles looked as strait as their cutaway chins and collars; the firmness of their lips spoke of difficulties planned and achieved. There were even times when Langholme was fanciful enough to think that their lips offered him words of real counsel.

In this ancient Hall the host would sometimes have a meal set. If there was nothing to talk about, there were the pictures to

behold. And that dining-room was refreshing by way of contrast with other rooms.

But, strange to say, Phraser would have preferred any other part of the building, even the old deserted chapel, for a meal. Those horrid pictures seemed to take away his appetite.

But a real country meal soon restores the spirits. The table, laden with fruits and flowers, seemed a place where "All autumn smiled"; and it did not lack its fair Eve, who was not this time an attendant. It was this part of the feast—we must tell the truth—that was most delicious to the lawyer, who prided himself on being a lover of the beautiful.

They sat down to the country banquet. The host was, as usual, anxious to be hospitable to his guest. Langholme had intended to defer business till luncheon was over. But fate was against him, and it would not be deferred.

The party were discussing some fine pears which had been placed in a centre dish. The post of honour by rights should have been held by the *épergne*, but this had been broken last night.

[It had been put down on the kitchen chair just after dinner, when John, the coachman was having a wee chat with cook.]

So the pear-dish stood in the midst of the banquet.

Mr. Langholme kept freely helping himself and his guests from the good things before him. At length he happened to lift up this very dish, displaying thereby an Indian jar underneath—a jar which had once contained Indian preserves, but now by perverse destiny was upholding English fruits. Partial image of the land of its birth, helping, as it does, to uphold the name of a distant people.

"Why, this is what poor Walrond sent us six months ago!" said Langholme.

Phraser moved in his chair.

"It's a pity, Phraser," he continued, "that he took offence in that silly way, and would go out to India. He forgave everybody, though, and left a good deal of money to those who had offended him."

"Indeed?"

This was a safe answer, Phraser thought; for it did not imply any knowledge of the will.

"But he seems," said Langholme, "by all accounts, to have had no one to take care of him at last."

"Dear me!" Phraser replied; "then we may say:

> "'He should have died in his own loved land,
> With weeping friends around him;
> Not have perished thus on a foreign strand,
> Where the hostile breakers bound him.'"

"By-the-by, Phraser, have you brought the will with you?"

This was sudden. Phraser's feeling was

as of a sharp fork piercing his midriff. But he showed no signs of perturbation, and merely answered,—

"Will? What *do* you mean, Langholme?"

Here, for the first time in the day, the latter showed signs of real alarm; and he said, somewhat hastily,—

"Why, haven't you got it? The will, you know. Walrond's will. Take your arm off me, Mary. Thomas Walrond's will."

Mr. Phraser gave that polite look of sympathy, mingled with alarm, which people bestow when they gently hint that some one has been reading or thinking too closely. But he only answered,—

"No."

"Then there's a mistake somewhere. Where is my letter? What did I do with it?"

Mary had just put it away. Should she fetch it him? she asked.

"What do you put things away for?" he replied, pettishly. "Fetch it, and let things alone in future."

Miss Langholme winced under the sudden reproof. She had got her hand on the door, when she heard Mr. Phraser saying,—

"If Miss Langholme will have the kindness to bring the will also with her, then we—"

But she did not stay to hear the end of the sentence. She only hastened the more, as her father seemed to be acquiescing with Phraser's request.

"One thing at a time," she thought, returning with the letter in her hand.

Langholme read it aloud. It was similar to the one received by Phraser, stating the circumstance of Walrond's decease, together with an intimation of the bequest of Rossleigh, and a notice that the real will had been sent to Mr. Phraser, of Newstel.

The latter listened to Langholme's reading in an attitude of serious attention. Then

he examined the letter, turned it over and over, and looked at the post-mark. At last he spoke in a tone of affectionate tenderness, as if to warn his client against too common imposture.

"If the bequest be so—"

"*If!* Mr. Phraser! Did I hear you say if? I must have misunderstood you!"

"Eh! ah! I only meant to say," he replied, with a touch of shame, "that we at the office shall probably receive a like intimation."

"But why, why, Phraser, haven't you got the will yet. Why?"

Mr. Phraser seemed to hesitate, Mary thought, before he replied.

"Such things are often delayed a post or two. Do keep calm, Mr. Langholme. I assure you there really is no cause for this anxiety. Permit me to reach you the claret."

He felt really anxious to withdraw from

the roguery. He could alter all that he had done. He would only have to persuade Hockster.

"Permit me to reach you the claret," he repeated.

"Then, when am I to call at the office?" replied Langholme, passing over the last remark.

"Oh! in the course of a week or so."

"Not till then? I shall come before then, Mr. Phraser."

"I wouldn't, if I were you; but you'll please yourself, of course. And I really should like the copy of the will if you can trust me so far."

Langholme was one of those men who never mistrust people until they have found them really unworthy of confidence. In the present instance he was vexed at the tardiness of the post, or at Phraser's apparent indifference to the interests of his daughter and himself. But to have refused Phraser

a copy of the will, would, he feared, put the latter to a sense of shame, as lacking his client's confidence. It might even injure the lawyer's prospects. So he said to his daughter,—

"Mary, I suppose you must have put it in the old safe in the red room, with the letter. Go and fetch it."

"If Miss Langholme will be so kind," said Phraser.

But Mary did not stir. She was a good, gentle girl. None liked her so much as the poor and weak. But now and then she had a look which betokened immovable resolution. Such a look she wore when she turned her eyes on her vacillating father. Langholme had always been cowed by that look.

"Father, dear," she said; "I am tired with my walk. Will you not take it to Mr. Phraser, if you think good, when you call on him?"

"Well, well, child; I think I will."

"Then in that case my duties here are over, Mr. Langholme. I shall expect you at the office in the space of a few days."

This was said rather curtly.

"We 'll drive you home, Phraser. The man has nothing to do but idle."

"Thank you, I shall enjoy the walk to the river. There I shall meet one of the coaches."

So, after a polite farewell, he took his departure. He had so far succeeded, he thought, that he had got it over. There was, of course, no proof that he had received any will. But still, he had only delayed the difficulty. Langholme would be sure to be questioning him in a few days, and might find out all. The will was—where was it?

Oh! in the red room, in a chest.

He jotted down some remark in his diary. He had soon reached the garden-gate.

John, the coachman, was gardening to-day. He thought the gent was a-whistling outside, but wasn't quite sure.

CHAPTER XXVI.

GUSTO HALL.

On wi' me.

BURNS.

THE reader remembers, it is to be hoped, the locality of "The Three Fiddles," where owd Claret-box and his party regaled themselves after Bowyer's mishap. The reader is not going to be transported inside that house. "Low life" of that sort is a thing with which writers of fiction never soil their hands. Of course not.

But the courteous reader *may* just look up at the swinging sign over the beershop. While he is looking through the dim night air, he will see three ground-eyeing scoundrels issue forth.

Very dark the night is! You can barely

see their faces. That lane, too, always was badly lighted; but to-night the drizzling rain makes it worse than usual.

See how they slink along. Look how they avoid the middle of the road and keep close in the shade of the walls. They talk in mysterious whispers.

Hush! there is the measured tread of the night-watchman. They have disappeared along three different passages. The watchman passes on, without a thought, good man, of there being anything wrong. The men look behind them and stealthily draw together.

They walk slowly. Now and then they whisper, but rarely. They take their way along many lanes and cross passages to that part of Newstel, where we have seen old Nancy lived. A few doors below that house they separated from one another for about a minute's space. Then meeting again, one of them stamped five times on the pavement,

opposite the back premises of a large tannery. In half a minute's time there was a shrill whistle, apparently beneath the pavement just where they were standing.

A curious thing happened.

Part of the pavement near the wall gradually lowered itself, and discovered a long passage below. It was approached by a deep set of stone-steps dimly lighted and winding along in the direction of the lane.

The three men descended in rather extreme haste.

They thought they had heard a step round the corner. The stone swung back apparently of its own accord. The men went down the steps, some thirty or forty in number, and came to the passage under the lane. This went on for some twenty yards when it turned to the right and left.

A bright lamp, swinging from the ceiling, shone upon three perplexed faces. Samuel Withers, the head of the party, *alias* Claret-

box, grimly looked about him. He seemed angry with Mr. Slofits, who was none other than policeman X 41 in plain clothes. There was a third named Little Tom, who seemed quite indifferent about the situation. But his dark scowling face quite eclipsed the black looks of the others. He had been a pugilist, until he had turned publican and had become part-owner of 'The Three Fiddles.'"

"Blest, if I arn't forgotten the way to Gusto Hall," said the first.

"Why, I thought you knew it well," Slofits observed.

"Let's try both," little Tom said.

"We carn't, 'cause the one leads to the river, and I've no fancy for a cold ducking. Listen."

The sound of rushing water was plainly audible. But it seemed to come from both passages. One certainly did lead to the river, but the other sounded with waters that rushed deep below covert trap-doors. Hence they heard rushing torrents on both sides.

"And, besides," Withers continued, sinking his voice to a whisper, "Jack takes care of one door, and he has his barkers out."

Barkers were pistols.

"And does he use them?" asked Slofits.

"Oh, yes, if you haven't the signal. I'd rather carry myself out than be carried out."

Further dispute was stopped by the opening of a large door at the end of the passage on the left. A bright light streamed forth, and they could now hear the confused murmur of voices in conversation and song mingling with the clatter of cups. That was the way then.

The three men hurried along the narrow passage, carefully stepping over any suspicious trap-doors. At length a kind of sentinel accosted them with the words:

"The captain's compliments."

"His humble servants," was the immediate reply.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ADMITTED.

Nothing lower nor more debased than the result.
TROLLOPE.

THE hall, for such it was into which Withers and his companions were admitted, was about fifty feet long, and thirty broad. Down the middle ran a long table, at which were seated numerous persons who seemed in the height of enjoyment. At least that appeared to be the case from the loudly-raised, excited voices, and the freely-flowing wine. At the top of the room ran a smaller table in a transverse direction. The persons seated there observed a greater sedateness. But their draughts were at least as deep.

The chief man of the party was seated on a raised chair in the middle of the latter

table. He wore blue spectacles, and his face was hidden by thick whiskers and moustache.

There was no doubt that he was the chief man. If he did but raise his eyes there was instant silence through the hall. He spoke little; merely answering or putting a question at times. It might have been thought, that he evinced little interest in the proceedings.

The hall was about twenty feet high. It appeared to have been made out of some cellars or warehouses. The walls were painted in gaudy colours, varied here and there with figures done with burnt stick. The best of these were a likeness of the chief man, of the head-police magistrate, and of the villain last hanged at the county assizes.

The room was well lighted. There appeared to be gas jets in it, though it was strange how the gas was procured there. There was certainly no lack of creature comforts.

No sooner had our three friends entered than the conversation ceased, and the head exclaimed in a deep voice:

"Do the stars shine?"

There was a fixed stare, and breathless silence as the three men replied together:

"Yea, 'tis quite fine!"

We can't explain the falsehood, for the reader knows that the night was far from being fine. But he may be informed this much. Of those seventy persons quietly seated in Gusto Hall, there was not one who did not, at the least, carry a loaded pistol, wherewith he would on the instant have done execution on the visitors had the captain so commanded. This he would certainly have done if they had forgotten or faltered in their last utterance.

There were, moreover—as has been hinted—curious and deep vaults below that strange apartment; and there was also the passage to the river. Dark tales were current in

Newstel of men who had disappeared. Some had been gamblers and speculators; others were steady men with wives and children—but they had got into what was called "low company," and never been heard of more. Here was a possible mode of exit.

The three men took their places at the bottom of the lower table. There they were recognised by their friends, and many hand-shakings took place. The roar of conversation was beginning afresh, when the captain spoke again:

"Business!" he exclaimed, in a voice that drowned the rising tumult.

Withers somewhat awkwardly took a note from a large pocket-book. He fumbled about a good deal before finding it, and even then, to the captain's evident annoyance, seemed uncertain whether it was right or not. At length he was stepping out of his seat to carry it to the captain's chair. But three men violently held him down.

He could not stir an inch.

Again, the captain spoke, apparently in anger.

"Fire or water?"

Withers seemed for a while puzzled, and somewhat frightened. The captain was frowning ominously. Malicious faces were looking significantly at one another. Withers felt that a false move would cost him his life. At last he slowly replied:

"Fire!"

"Good," was the answer. "Then hand up the teller."

The teller was the note or letter.

He sprang up, and was carrying his note, when he was again stopped, but this time more gently. A man approached him, and demanded the letter, which he took to the captain. The latter, having read it without altering a feature, jotted down some remark, and fell back into apparent apathy. The noise of merriment was heard again. And

the three men were left to their own conversation and reflections.

It was a strange company. Faces deeply furrowed with debauchery, want, crime, and low cunning were brought close to one another; faces entirely engrossed with their own evil thoughts. It was a scene of vice without a redeeming feature. Such a collection of human beings—all reprobates and utterly beyond hope of recovery—might have caused a cold shudder to any one less hardened in villainy than our three companions.

Here was a man with small grey eyes and pitted face. After a distinguished university career he had proceeded to the colonies, whence he had come back—one of a gang of thieves. That small dark man, who never looks up from the ground, narrowly escaped the gallows on a charge of poisoning. This thin, humpbacked man had married an heiress, and himself inherited a fortune. But his children were in the workhouse, and he

himself was a common burglar. That fellow with desperate look and bloodshot eyes had been a clergyman, but he took to drink. Not one but had a history almost too painful to relate.

The conversation around our three men referred to a desperate deed—an attack on a farmer driving home towards Donnerberg—and various opinions were hazarded as to the skill with which the deed had been performed. The farmer had unfortunately escaped with his life, a fact which caused among these hardened villains a laugh at the perpetrator's expense. It seemed like a want of skill. The robber was certainly a man who had rarely left his work incomplete. This time, however, as he said, he had not been quite "in form." Among his close friends, the fellow, who had many *aliases*, was called Blinks. The man did not at all like being rallied by the playful remarks around him. He became by degrees somewhat excited.

"Well done, Blinkey!" said a fellow on the other side of the table; "you've got one friend now."

"Ay, he's done it cleverly—taken the harness and left the horse."

"A long walk on a cold night, to overturn a light cart!"

"Never you mind," the man kept saying. But all this time he was becoming hotter and more excited.

At last one of his companions, bolder than the rest, pulled hold of his ear with a coarse joke, and said,—

"Here's a kind, good darling!"

This was more than the ruffian could stand. Raising his clenched fist, his eyes flaming with passion, he felled his opponent to the ground. The latter was up directly, with a deep gash in his head; and the two men fronted one another like glaring lions. With the desperation of wild beasts, they locked one another in a firm embrace. But

it was an ordinary occurrence, and scarcely excited any notice. At last one of them was thrown violently upon the floor, where he lay stunned, his head bleeding from a deep wound. The other, faint and tottering, reeled back to his drink.

And this yelling and shouting deep below the ground, was going on while the gentle dawn was breaking over a town which that very day would ring with church bells, and resound with the chants of worshippers,—a town, too, which had devoted a part of its very cricket-ground to open air preaching. But the noise continued, and would have gone on still longer, had not the door suddenly opened. The porter who had entered closed the door behind him.

He loudly exclaimed,—"Rouse!"

There was silence in an instant. The captain, with the same apathy as had before marked his proceedings, received a whispered message.

He rose, and said,—

"The stars pale."

The seventy men were on their feet at once. They repeated, in monotonous cadence,—

"The glasses fail."

The former then continued, with words and accents the reverse of vulgar,—

"Three things are before us. Visitors must be helped in destroying valuable evidence. Mind—destroying, not plunder."

A murmur of dissatisfaction was quelled by his haughty manner, as he said,—

"The Mayor's chair must be filled."

To this the men seemed to agree. He then continued,—

"None may leave by the steps. The spy is lurking about again."

In two minutes every light was out, and the men dispersed through mysterious passages.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SILENT GROWTH.

I said: O weary heart find thou
The stillness of creation now;
And as the meadow's flowers are closing,
Prepare thyself for sweet reposing.

RÜCKERT.

BOWYER was learning deep lessons of wisdom. He was friendly, though in a distant way, with Hockster, and was high in the good graces of Mrs. Pritchers, who thought him "A hestimable young man, but rather too stewdious like." Susan, too, had often a smart ribbon in her cap when she waited on him.

But it is one thing to be respected as a scholar, another to be an aspirant for respect. The recognition of worth often stimulates its fortunate possessor to his utmost exer-

tions. But the stimulus of poverty, however great the treasures it has called forth, is at best a painful stimulus, and not unfrequently a restraint on the free play of the mental powers. The greatest works of genius, in literature as in art, have generally arisen in an atmosphere of freedom, when the craftsman has been complete master of his time and mind. Every thinker requires the leisure to bring to maturity his hidden conceptions. How silently great thoughts come into the mind, taking to flight again at preoccupation! With the few only they become a ruling master, who will assert himself. Happy they who, when the mighty master commands, are not deterred from obedience by the calls of daily sustenance! Otherwise there ensues a conflict and wasting away and ending.

Bowyer's thoughts were not, indeed, of that overpowering kind. He was right in supposing the world would be no loser in not sharing them. They required experi-

ence to make them manly and useful. The young man even deluded himself into the fancy that all systematic repression is a good thing.

That idea sprang partly from his natural contentment. Albeit, somewhat pent up at present, he was satisfied with his lot. One or two incidents also occurred to make him attach importance to his fancy. In a long walk over Donnerberg he had noticed a tract of burnt moorland. He asked about it, and was told that he was an ignorant fellow, and that it was burnt to make it grow finer. A cottager had informed him that a lopped tree would be the better next year. Trifling matters of that kind had made an impression on the young man's mind.

He might have been shown that the knife may cut too deeply both into trees and men. But John was not one to brood long over small disappointments, and youthful nature soon recovers itself.

In spite of his theory, however, he did at times feel conscious of a something within, which would at length make itself known for good or evil. He had noticed that his opinion, uttered in strong words of prose or verse, began to attract notice. This made him fancy—what he would often tell himself—that his mind was becoming a kingdom to himself in the true sense; not from his supposing himself all-sufficient, but from an increasing appreciation of others besides himself, from whom, in imparting his own, he would receive mental treasures in return. "He would never hold himself aloof from people," he said. He would be of use in the world.

A fine thought, no doubt! But unfortunately the world doesn't want fine thoughts so much as thoughtful deeds. It desires a few minds who shall make their presence felt by quiet well-doing.

Bowyer's hard work — as hard, he used

to think, as the stonebreaker's by the road-side—only he had never tried it—procured enough to keep him independent. "And a good deal lay," he said, "in that one word. He was indebted to no one, and his books were as bold as his mind. They were plainly sewed, and in paper covers. There was not a handsome compilation amongst them. But he would look at Some-one's "Einleitung" or "Reine Vernunft" or a Charles XII. or Montalambert's something, and be quite satisfied.

His mind and life were free. He was chained to nothing—certainly, not to his literary pursuits. Such labours, he thought—though many would have laughed at him—ought not to be followed as an end in themselves. Therefore, he diversified his life as much as he could.

Not that many friends looked into his solitary chamber. But even Hockster served to lend variety to his solitude. The young

clerk regarded him as a book-worm, and as one who must be patronized.

The development, however, which John's mind needed, was not such as his fellow-lodger could supply. What he wanted was a natural growth, which would come in its own time. John was already settling down, and getting clearer notions of the meaning of life. He had almost felt—if the expression is not absurd—a conscious growth dating from one particular event.

This event was his accidental visit to Phraser's house, already recorded. Since then his whole manner had altered. He was no longer wrapt up in abstractions, or wild about Darwin and Huxley. He would stand at his window for hours together and fall into reveries. He was not theorizing about the passing crowds. His thoughts were far distant from them. He began to read his books in a dreamy state too. And very little good he got from them. But

perhaps his mind was gaining something higher than anything these could supply. Who shall say which is the more useful, an hour spent in severe thought or one loitered away by the ruined bridge, where every wave reflects the sunlight?

Whatever could these dreamy visions be that kept flitting through his soul, leaving him better than they found him? They were but a beginning of something, nothing but immature longings. They were very sweet, however, and came to him blended with a sort of worship; but it was a worship of something on this earth.

In fact, he was beginning to think that there was such a thing as personal influence. Nay, he had found out that there is a power more excellent and wonderful than that. "Could not," he asked himself, "one human being cheer and refine another, raising him to heights of purity and wisdom, as yet by him untraversed?" He was groping after

he knew not what. But he was on the right track. When he walked out in his reveries, people need not have thought him a suspicious fellow because he was too busy to look at them. His own thoughts were becoming a kingdom at last.

A curious history he had had before the time when he first emerges on our pages. He was fond of recalling the events of his childhood. To a retentive mind like his, it was an intense pleasure to retrace the most trifling circumstances of his early days. Even the least of such events he treasured up, and perhaps his frequent dwelling upon them made them always fresh. He often recalled the face of that kind, good-natured man who had once taken care of him in a sunny garden, beside a gentle playmate. And he had not forgotten a large house with many windows. It seemed to be borne back upon him with the scent of every full-blown rose.

He often asked himself what it is that makes one's memory capricious. Why it remembers some things, and most provokingly forgets others. But these trifling matters were nearly all that he could remember of his earliest days. And these memories, had John told any one of them, would probably have excited contempt or incredulity.

Later events he could of course remember well enough. For years he had wandered about with people who made their home, as it pleased them, in the field, the forest, or the waste. He had learnt their language and customs. He had even become a sort of favourite. One rough fellow he remembered, who was always ready to share his meal lest the child should go without support. And there was a woman—rough enough to the ordinary world—who used often to take him on her knee, soothing his fears, and rocking him gently to sleep. It

must have been the latter, he thought, who had so often said that "He would slip away some day, for he had a little, tiny body that could get through a keyhole!" But it was his friends who had deserted him. They had fallen into danger during some adventure. The child, left behind in the dark, had been picked up by the man of the company, who had always shown an interest in him. It was he who, to get him away from evil associates, gave him to an old woman from Newstel. That was some fourteen years ago. He was about eight years old then.

A very poor woman she was, but not quite so stern and cold as at the time when the reader first made her acquaintance. For old Nancy has already appeared in these pages. She was one of the few respectable persons whom the gipsy knew. She worked for her daily bread, and was never in debt. And she taught the lad to

forget his old thievish habits, and paid for his schooling long before the days of School Boards, and thought it a well spent sixpence if he could learn about "the next world."

The boy proved a forward scholar, and when sixteen, was suspected of knowing more than the very master. Then a real clergyman had taken compassion on him, and taught him subjects rarely imparted to lads in his station.

That was the time when the great blow had fallen. It was but six years ago, and he had not yet recovered from its effects.

He had long noticed an increasingly anxious look about his protectress. Without intruding into her evident sorrow, he tried to soothe her by unobtrusive offices of love. But she began to be absent for long periods, sometimes for a week together. She once muttered something, he remembered, about

a relative in the country. On one occasion she had returned home dressed in deep black, clumsily cut as if by herself. Her look was very sad indeed; but, he thought, tempered with resignation.

One day, after coming from his tutor's, he found the old woman bending over a mourning card. On his entrance she hastily shuffled it away. But he could not help seeing the words, "Lucy Clifford." This must have been the relation of hers.

It was then that Nancy received several visits from a gentleman, whose face he could never get to see. It might have been the doctor. For some months the old woman seemed in constant melancholy, and in ill-health. She appeared to have some care on her mind, or to be in fear about some impending event, of which she wished John to be ignorant. A strange anger—John thought it the effect of some delusion—came

over her whenever the young man had the newspaper in his hand. This must have been a sign of failing health. John's anxiety about her preyed on his spirits, and made him ill. Nancy saw this, and one day made a proposal which greatly delighted the young man.

But he little knew her motive.

John's tutor was just going to the neighbouring cathedral town. Nancy had induced him to let John go too. The good man was glad to take him. The new and primitive style of music just started in the minster would, he made no doubt, work wonders on his pupil's health. So John spent a week in the neighbouring town.

In a week's time John returned. But he found the house fast locked. Nancy rarely went away for long together now, and John was frightened. A neighbour who had the key looked rather shyly, he fancied, as she told him of a letter waiting for him. It seemed

to be in Nancy's large round handwriting. When John had read it, he fainted away. Its words might have been of fire. It told him that Nancy was compelled to leave Newstel, and dare not say where or why she had gone. It ended with an affectionate but, as John thought, dramatic farewell.

Thus old Nancy had mysteriously gone, and John was left alone. Whether some delusion had possessed her, or she had been really forced away, he had never found out. She was gone, and his life was sad. Bitterly did the young man reproach himself for having abandoned her at a time of concealed, but no doubt terrible, suffering.

There was not, however, any real mystery about the disappearance. People in Newstel knew well what had become of her. And so would John have done, had he looked at the *Newstel Chronicle.*

But he trusted the note which he had read. Still, he did not believe that the old woman was dead. Never once did he abandon the hope, which with him amounted to a steadfast conviction, that he would see her again. He hoped as firmly as ever did Sir Roderic Murchison; and, let us pray, with better issue. Old Nancy could not have been ill treated. Her life was worth too little. She could not have been robbed. Unexpectedly, she would return some day. For years he started at a louder knock than usual. He would walk round the old house, and feel quite angry at the merry children romping about.

But even this grief toned down with time. His tutor soon obtained for him abler instruction than his own, and this brought him into a new sphere and fresh associations. He had to compete with others. He came in contact with various dispositions and capacities. He saw fresh

scenes and faces. He enlarged his range of study.

The result of one of his competitions, the reader has seen in one of the opening chapters.

The Board had had no idea that he was a young man of family.

John's mind was thus developing silently and quietly. Perhaps too monotonously for the reader to have felt much interest in this chapter. But the events here recorded are of importance to the progress of our tale, and we must beg the reader to keep them in mind. And Mr. Bowyer's opinions and meditations, of however little intrinsic worth in themselves, represented the settled convictions of his mind, and had grown up with the curious circumstances of his history. He was made of flesh and blood, like other young men. But now and then he reminded his friends and enemies of iron poured into a crooked mould.

But that was an obvious comparison to people engaged in the Newstel trades.

It did not necessarily refer to any special qualities—of crookedness and inflexibility—in our hero.

It was only their mode of expression.

END OF VOL. I.

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